



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY — 7 APR 2022

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Events, Opportunities

HEADLINE	04/07 Colds, flu come roaring back
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/colds-and-the-flu-roaring-back-after-vanishing-during-covid/
GIST	<p>They've arrived just when life seemed good again.</p> <p>Cold and flu germs, which nearly vanished for two years, are roaring back, according to doctors and federal disease-trackers.</p> <p>As we do less masking and more hugging and handshaking, "there is greater transmission of viruses," said Dr. Jorge Salinas, hospital epidemiologist for Stanford Health Care.</p> <p>To be sure, COVID-19 is still spreading.</p> <p>But other long-lost ailments are catching up. At schools, "it's not COVID," said Salinas. "Everybody has a cough and one thing or another."</p> <p>For a long time, masks and social distancing did a bang-up job of protecting us. But now we've gotten casual. And we're all heading back to our regular haunts, rediscovering the kind of liberation that comes with a fully-booked vaccine card.</p> <p>"People are moving around more," sharing their germs with others, said UC San Francisco infectious disease expert Dr. Peter Chin-Hong.</p> <p>Several other things are driving the trend, he said.</p> <p>This year's flu vaccine was a flop. There was a mismatch between the strains of virus in the vaccine and what's circulating, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The 2021-2022 flu shots were only 16% effective at reducing a person's chance of getting a mild or moderate infection — compared to some prior years, where rates reached as high as 50% or 60%.</p> <p>While the nation's overall flu activity has begun to decline, it remains elevated or is increasing in certain regions, including parts of the West. In some Bay Area communities, wastewater surveillance shows a jump in the prevalence of flu viruses starting around March 23.</p> <p>Secondly, we're back to touching everything again. It was reassuring when COVID research showed it wasn't necessary to wash mail and groceries. But — surprise! — cold-causing rhinoviruses are more hardy than coronaviruses. They can live on surfaces for longer. And they're tougher to wash off your hands.</p> <p>Finally, our immune systems have forgotten what these routine viruses look like.</p> <p>"We've been in 'COVID country' for the last two years," said Chin-Hong. "So we don't have as much immunity to any of these other things."</p> <p>After spending nearly 28 months being panicked at the first sign of any sickness, it's unsettling to experience a drippy nose, stuffy head, coughs and sneezes.</p> <p>Over time, however, society will readjust to this higher risk of perfectly ordinary ailments, doctors said. It's part of regaining some semblance of normality.</p> <p>But COVID taught us some lessons that may help reduce transmission of these routine and annoying germs, said Salinas and Chin-Hong. For instance, our buildings are better ventilated. We've learned it's important to socially distance — even stay home — when you're sick.</p> <p>That mask? Don't toss it yet.</p>

	<p>"I hope our culture changes," said Chin-Hong. "Wearing a mask when you have even mild symptoms – that's good for all of us.</p> <p>"I hope that's the legacy of the last few years."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Ukraine seeks stronger Russia sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-seeks-ruinous-sanctions-russia-amid-european-hesitancy-2022-04-06/
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine, April 7 (Reuters) - Ukraine renewed a call on Thursday for financial sanctions crippling enough to force Moscow to end the war and its officials rushed to evacuate civilians from cities and towns in the east and south pounded by Russian artillery and missiles.</p> <p>The democratic world must stop buying Russian oil and cut off Russian banks from the international finance system, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said, adding that economic concerns should not come above punishment for civilian killings that the West condemns as war crimes.</p> <p>"Once and for all, we can teach Russia and any other potential aggressors that those who choose war always lose," Zelenskiy said in an address to Greek parliament. "Those who blackmail Europe with economic and energy crisis always lose."</p> <p>Washington announced new measures including sanctions on Russian President Vladimir Putin's two adult daughters and a major bank. However, the European Union failed to approve a new round of measures including a ban on Russian coal on Wednesday. Top EU diplomat Josep Borrell said the package could be passed on Thursday or Friday.</p> <p>Speaking at a NATO meeting, Borrell said the EU would discuss an embargo on Russian oil, adding he hoped it would come soon. In a symbolic move, the United Nations General Assembly will vote on Thursday on suspending Russia from the U.N. Human Rights Council.</p> <p>The pressure to tighten sanctions follows international condemnation of apparent executions of civilians in the streets of Bucha, a town northeast of the capital Kyiv and recaptured from Russian invaders, along with signs Russia is preparing for an offensive in the south and east of the country.</p> <p>After they pulled out from areas near Kyiv, Russian forces were now regrouping to gain full control over the eastern breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, Ukrainian officials say. The besieged southern port of Mariupol, whose mayor said over 100,000 were still trapped, was also a target.</p> <p>"Evacuate! The chances of saving yourself and your family from Russian death are dwindling every day," said Serhiy Gaidai, the governor of the Luhansk region.</p> <p>Deputy Prime Minister Irena Vereshchuk said 10 evacuation corridors were agreed on Thursday, but said Mariupol residents would need their own vehicles to leave.</p> <p>Russia says it is engaged in a "special military operation" designed to demilitarise and "denazify" Ukraine, which Kyiv and its Western allies reject that as a false pretext for its invasion.</p> <p>The six-week-long war has forced over 4 million Ukrainians to flee abroad, killed or injured thousands, left a quarter of the population homeless, turned cities into rubble and set off Western restrictions targeting Russian elites and the economy.</p> <p>SHOT IN THE FOREHEAD</p> <p>A local woman collects garbage next to her house damaged by heavy shelling and airstrikes in Chernihiv A cross and a dome of a local church damaged by shelling are seen in the settlement of Hostomel</p>

People wait to be evacuated from the heavily shelled town of Derhachi outside Kharkiv

Western policymakers have denounced the killings in Bucha as war crimes, and Ukrainian officials say a mass grave by a church there contained between 150 and 300 bodies.

Reuters reporters saw the body of a man with a rope tied around his feet and a charred hole in his forehead in the town on Wednesday, one of at least five victims shot through the head documented by the news organisation.

Moscow has denied targeting civilians and says images of bodies in Bucha were staged to justify more sanctions against Moscow and derail peace talks.

The German government has indications that Russia was involved in the killing of civilians in Bucha based on satellite images, a security source said on Thursday. read more Media outlets including Reuters have seen satellite images released by a private security company that appear to show bodies in the town while it was still occupied by Russia.

Ukraine says its allies must go further to stop Moscow's war machine, calling for a total ban on energy imports from Russia, halting any supplies Russia could use in weapons production, and more arms deliveries for its army.

"Sanctions against Russia must be ruinous enough for us to end this terrible war," the head of Ukraine's presidential office Andriy Yermak said late on Wednesday.

BALANCING ACT

While Washington took more steps to isolate Russia, sanctioning lenders Sberbank(SBER.MM) and Alfa Bank, banning U.S. investment there and calling for its expulsion from the Group of 20 major economies, Europe grappled with the challenge of extending its sanctions into the sensitive energy sector. read more

The approval of the latest package of European Union sanctions targeting almost 20 billion euros (\$21.78 billion) in trade got delayed because Germany wanted more time to implement a full ban on Russian coal, an EU source said. The ban could be approved on Thursday but would not take effect until August, a month later than previously proposed.

Britain also froze Sberbank's assets, and said it would ban imports of Russian coal, but not until the end of the year.

While the EU executive has said it will take up a ban on Russian crude imports next, that will require an even greater balancing act for the bloc where Russian gas accounts for about 40% of its gas consumption and about a third of crude imports.

As first to break ranks with the rest of the EU, Hungary said it was prepared to eschew Brussels' guidance and meet a Russian demand to pay roubles for its gas, in what Ukraine described as an "unfriendly act."

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HEADLINE	04/07 Shanghai wrestles w/food shortages
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-business-health-shanghai-china-db82171b57b0768fea8352c1cd98bf39
GIST	<p>BEIJING (AP) — Residents of Shanghai are struggling to get meat, rice and other food supplies under anti-coronavirus controls that confine most of its 25 million people in their homes, fueling frustration as the government tries to contain a spreading outbreak.</p> <p>People in China's business capital complain that online grocers often are sold out. Some received government food packages of meat and vegetables for a few days. But with no word on when they will be allowed out, anxiety is rising.</p>

Zhang Yu, 33, said her household of eight eats three meals a day but has cut back to noodles for lunch. They received no government supplies.

“It’s not easy to keep this up,” said Zhang, who starts shopping online at 7 a.m.

“We read on the news there is (food), but we just can’t buy it,” she said. “As soon as you go to the grocery shopping app, it says today’s orders are filled.”

The complaints are an embarrassment for the ruling Communist Party during a politically sensitive year when President Xi Jinping is expected to try to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as leader.

Shanghai highlights the soaring human and economic cost of China’s “zero-COVID” strategy that aims to isolate every infected person.

On Thursday, the government reported 23,107 new cases nationwide, all but 1,323 of which had no symptoms. That included 19,989 in Shanghai, where only 329 had symptoms.

Complaints about food shortages began after Shanghai closed segments of the city on March 28.

Plans called for four-day closures of districts while residents were tested. That changed to an indefinite citywide shutdown after case numbers soared. Shoppers who got little warning stripped supermarket shelves.

City officials apologized publicly last week and promised to improve food supplies.

Officials say Shanghai, home of the world’s busiest port and China’s main stock exchange, has enough food. But a deputy mayor, Chen Tong, acknowledged Thursday getting it the “last 100 meters” to households is a challenge.

“Shanghai’s battle against the epidemic has reached the most critical moment,” Chen said at a news conference, according to state media. He said officials “must go all out to get living supplies to the city’s 25 million people.”

At the same event, a vice president of Meituan, China’s biggest food delivery platform, blamed a shortage of staff and vehicles, according to a transcript released by the company. The executive, Mao Fang, said Meituan has moved automated delivery vehicles and nearly 1,000 extra employees to Shanghai.

Another online grocer, Dingdong Maicai, said it shifted 500 employees in Shanghai from other posts to making deliveries.

Li Xiaoliang, an employee of a courier company, complained the government overlooks people living in hotels. He said he is sharing a room with two coworkers after positive cases were found near his rented house.

Li, 30, said they brought instant noodles but those ran out. Now, they eat one meal a day of 40 yuan (\$6) lunch boxes ordered at the front desk, but the vendor sometimes doesn’t deliver. On Thursday, Li said he had only water all day.

The local government office “clearly said that they didn’t care about those staying in the hotel and left us to find our own way,” Li said. “What we need most now is supplies, food.”

After residents of a Shanghai apartment complex stood on their balconies to sing this week in a possible protest, a drone flew overhead and broadcast the message: “Control the soul’s desire for freedom and do not open the window to sing. This behavior has the risk of spreading the epidemic.”

The government says it is trying to reduce the impact of its tactics, but authorities still are enforcing curbs that also block access to the industrial cities of Changchun and Jilin with millions of residents in the northeast.

While the Shanghai port's managers say operations are normal, the chair of the city's chapter of the European Chamber of Commerce in China, Bettina Schoen-Behanzin, said its member companies estimate the volume of cargo handled has fallen 40%.

Some large factories and financial firms are having employees sleep at work to keep operating. But Schoen-Behanzin said with no timetable to end lockdowns, "some workers aren't volunteering any more."

Residents of smaller cities also have been confined temporarily to their homes this year as Chinese officials try to contain outbreaks.

In 2020, access to cities with a total of 60 million people was suspended in an unprecedented attempt to contain the outbreak. The ruling party organized vast supply networks to bring in food.

A resident of the Minhang district on Shanghai's west side who asked to be identified only by her surname, Chen, said her household of five was given government food packages on March 30 and April 4. They included chicken, eggplant, carrots, broccoli and potatoes.

Now, vegetables are available online but meat, fish and eggs are hard to find, Chen said. She joined a neighborhood "buying club." Minimum orders are 3,000 yuan (\$500), "so you need other people," she said.

"Everyone is organizing to order food, because we can't count on the government to send it to us," Chen said. "They're not reliable."

A message from a viewer of an online news conference by the city's health bureau challenged officials: "Put down the script! Please tell leaders to buy vegetables by mobile phone on the spot."

Gregory Gao, an operations specialist for an automaker who lives alone in the downtown Yangpu district, said only Meituan remains after food sellers said supply sites in the area were closing.

"I can't get anything for two or three days in a row," said Gao, 29.

Zhang said some of her neighbors have run out of rice.

"The government told us at the beginning this would last four days," she said. "Many people were not prepared."

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HEADLINE	04/07 Ukraine pleads for more weapons
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-kyiv-europe-moscow-8bca2a7ed323eec21be80ccfde091496
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine told residents of its industrial heartland to leave while they still can and urged Western nations to send "weapons, weapons, weapons" Thursday after Russian forces withdrew from the shattered outskirts of Kyiv to regroup for an offensive in the country's east.</p> <p>Russia's six-week-old invasion failed to take Ukraine's capital quickly and achieve what Western countries say was President Vladimir Putin's initial aim of ousting the Ukrainian government. Russia's focus is now on the Donbas, a mostly Russian-speaking region in eastern Ukraine.</p>

In Brussels, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba urged NATO to provide more weapons and help his war-torn country prevent further alleged atrocities like those reported in Kyiv's northern outskirts. Ukrainian authorities are working to identify hundreds of bodies found in Bucha and other towns after Russian troops withdrew and to document evidence of possible war crimes.

"My agenda is very simple. ... it's weapons, weapons and weapons," Kuleba said as he arrived at NATO headquarters for talks with the military organization's foreign ministers.

"The more weapons we get and the sooner they arrive in Ukraine, the more human lives will be saved," he said.

The Western alliance is striving to avoid actions that might pull any of its 30 members directly into the war. Still, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg urged member nations to send Ukraine more weapons, and not just defensive arms.

Western countries have provided Ukraine with portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, but they have been reluctant to supply aircraft, tanks or any equipment that Ukrainian troops would have to be trained to use.

Asked what more his country was seeking, Kuleba listed planes, land-based missiles, armored vehicles and air defense systems.

Moscow announced more than a week ago that it planned to concentrate its forces in the east, and they have largely withdrawn from Kyiv and the north. Growing numbers of Putin's troops, along with mercenaries, have been reported moving into the Donbas, where Russia-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian forces for eight years and control two areas.

Ahead of its Feb. 24 invasion, Moscow recognized the Luhansk and Donetsk areas as independent states. Military analysts have said Putin could be seeking to expand into government-controlled territory.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk urged civilians to evacuate to safer regions before it was too late.

"Later, people will come under fire, and we won't be able to do anything to help them," Vereshchuk said.

She said Ukraine and Russian officials agreed to establish 10 civilian evacuation routes from Donetsk, Luhansk and the Zaporizhzhia region. She said residents would be able to seek safety in the cities of Zaporizhzhia in southeast Ukraine and Bakhmut in the east.

The change of Russia's focus brought relief to Chernihiv, a city near Ukraine's northern border with Belarus that was encircled and cut off for weeks,

The departed troops left behind twisted buildings and traumatized residents, who clambered over rubble and passed cars destroyed by the fighting. Dozens of people lined up for food, diapers and medicine Thursday at a shattered school now serving as an aid-distribution point.

The blackboard in one classroom was chalked, "Wednesday the 23rd of February - class work." Russia invaded Ukraine the next day, besieging Chernihiv as its troops tried to sweep south towards the capital.

"At last we can bring food," said Viktoriia Veruha, who was distributing aid at the school. "We can now bring food, medicine, and we can evacuate people from Chernihiv, which is also very important."

Tatiana Nesterenko, who left the city and crossed to Medyka in Poland, joined more than 4.3 million refugees who have fled Ukraine since the war started.

"We spent 40 days in a basement," she said. "Our home was destroyed by an airstrike. ... Many people are homeless now, and there were a lot of victims. There was no help, no volunteers for us. We extinguished the fire by ourselves."

Britain's defense ministry said Thursday that Russia was targeting the "line of control" between Ukrainian-held and rebel-controlled areas in the Donbas with artillery and airstrikes and hitting infrastructure targets around Ukraine to wear down the Ukrainian defense.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it struck fuel storage sites around the cities of Mykolaiv, Zaporozhe, Kharkiv and Chuguev overnight using cruise missiles fired from ships in the Black Sea.

A Ukrainian naval vessel caught fire under unclear circumstances in the besieged port city of Mariupol, satellite photos analyzed Thursday by The Associated Press show. The images from Planet Labs PBC appear to show the Ukrainian command ship Donbas burning at the Sea of Azov port on Wednesday afternoon as a nearby building also burned.

A cause for the fire remained unclear.

Mariupol has experienced some of the war's greatest deprivations. Russian forces are fighting street by street to capture the city; doing so would allow Russia to secure a continuous land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow seized from Ukraine in 2014.

Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boichenko said more than 5,000 civilians have been killed during weeks of Russian bombardment and street fighting, including 210 children. British defense officials said 160,000 people remained trapped in the city, which had a prewar population of 430,000.

Oleksandr Shputun, spokesman for the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, reported Thursday that Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, remained blockaded near the Donbas. He said Russian forces also were carrying out "brutal measures" in the southern Kherson region, which they hold.

The International Criminal Court has opened an investigation into possible war crimes in Ukraine. In areas north of the capital, Ukrainian officials gathered evidence of Russian atrocities amid signs Moscow's troops killed people indiscriminately before retreating.

Ukrainian authorities said the bodies of at least 410 civilians were found in towns around Kyiv, victims of what Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has portrayed as a Russian campaign of murder, rape, dismemberment and torture. Some victims were apparently shot at close range or died with their hands bound.

Western officials warned that similar atrocities were likely to have taken place in other areas occupied by Russian troops. Zelenskyy accused Russian forces of trying to cover up war crimes in areas still under their control, "afraid that the global anger over what was seen in Bucha would be repeated."

"We have information that the Russian troops have changed tactics and are trying to remove the dead people, the dead Ukrainians, from the streets and cellars of territory they occupied," he said in a nighttime video address. "This is only an attempt to hide the evidence and nothing more."

The Kremlin insists its troops have committed no war crimes and alleged the Ukrainians staged the images of brutality coming out of Bucha, where piles of body bags were getting taken to a facility for identification and investigation.

Two former German government ministers have submitted a criminal complaint with federal prosecutors seeking the opening of a war crimes probe against Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin and Russian military personnel.

	<p>The pair want to use national laws allowing for the prosecution in Germany of individuals accused of serious crimes committed elsewhere.</p> <p>Lawyer Nikolaos Gazeas, who compiled the 140-page criminal complaint on their behalf, cited a report Thursday by news weekly Der Spiegel that said Germany's foreign intelligence agency had intercepted radio messages between Russian soldiers discussing the killings of civilians in Bucha.</p> <p>Gazeas said parallel probes in multiple jurisdictions made sense and could be mutually reinforcing. Members of the U.S. House late Wednesday overwhelmingly passed legislation calling for a federal government report on evidence of war crimes committed during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>In reaction to the alleged atrocities, the U.S. announced sanctions against Putin's two adult daughters and said it is toughening penalties against Russian banks. Britain banned investment in Russia and pledged to end its dependence on Russian coal and oil by the end of the year.</p> <p>The European Union is also expected to take additional punitive measures, including an embargo on Russian coal.</p> <p>Zelenskyy said the sanctions would not be effective unless they included a ban on Russian oil imports, on which Europe relies heavily. He said the West's sanctions on Russia so far "can't be called commensurate to the evil the world saw in Bucha" and elsewhere.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Covid cases rise again in half of states
SOURCE	https://www.axios.com/covid-cases-rise-again-in-half-the-states-43180a96-9339-450d-966a-0631d04d9490.html
GIST	<p>Half of the states are seeing COVID case numbers rise again while nationwide totals continue to fall.</p> <p>The big picture: The Omicron subvariant known as BA.2 is the dominant strain circulating around the U.S., accounting for almost three out of every four cases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As in-person gatherings have begun again, COVID has sickened a number of Washington A-listers, reminding everyone — yet again — we're not out of the woods with this pandemic. <p>By the numbers: Overall, cases dropped 5% across the U.S. to an average of about 28,700 cases from an average of more than 30,000 cases two weeks ago.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three states — Alaska, Vermont and Rhode Island — had more than 20 new cases per 100,000 people. Nine states — Utah, Montana, South Dakota, Kansas, Louisiana, Iowa, Arkansas, Indiana and Tennessee — had three or fewer new cases per 100,000 people. <p>Between the lines: Deaths fell to an average of 600 a day, down 34% from just over 900 a day two weeks ago.</p> <p>What we're watching: While U.S. officials have said they aren't expecting a significant rise in hospitalizations or deaths, there have been signs of hospitalizations rising among older individuals in the U.K., the Guardian reported.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since those numbers lag behind new cases, we won't have a clear view of that impact in the U.S. for a few weeks. The highly contagious subvariant surged through parts of Europe but probably will spare many Americans, thanks in part to this winter's Omicron surge.
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HEADLINE	04/07 Russia ruble comes roaring back
SOURCE	https://finance.yahoo.com/news/mocked-rubble-biden-russia-ruble-193615066.html

(Bloomberg) -- In the days after the Ukraine war began, the ruble's collapse was a potent symbol of Russia's newfound financial isolation.

International sanctions on Vladimir Putin's regime sank it to a record low of 121.5 rubles per dollar, triggering memories of the battering it took during the 1998 Russian financial crisis.

Things looked dire enough that U.S. President Joe Biden said the ruble had been reduced to "rubble."

Now, though, it sure hasn't. The ruble has surged all the way back to where it was before Putin invaded Ukraine, extending its recent rally to trade as strong as 74.2625 per dollar in early Moscow trade on Thursday.

What's become clear is that despite an incredibly wide-ranging package of sanctions on the Russian government and its oligarchs, and an exodus of foreign businesses, the actions are largely toothless if foreigners keep guzzling Russian oil and natural gas -- supporting the ruble by stocking Putin's coffers.

Even as Russia remains mostly cut off otherwise from the global economy, Bloomberg Economics expects the country will earn nearly \$321 billion from energy exports this year, up more than a third from 2021.

The rapid ruble recovery gives Putin a major victory back in Russia, where many people fixate on the currency's ups and downs, even as his military gets bogged down in Ukraine and outrage mounts across the globe over atrocities it's committed.

"For the politicians, it is a good PR tool by saying that sanctions don't have any impact. And it will help to limit the inflation impact," said Guillaume Tresca, a senior emerging-market strategist at Generali Insurance Asset Management.

In Russia's post-Soviet history, the ruble-dollar exchange rate has arguably been the economic indicator Russians care most about. The rate was broadcast by the exchange kiosks that sprung up in every town and city, flagging the currency's collapse as hyperinflation erupted in the early 1990s. The ruble dived again after Russia defaulted in 1998.

Once that chaos subsided, the government lopped off three zeros. Then during the 2008 crisis, the authorities burned through billions of dollars to slow the currency's slide, in part to avoid spooking the population and sparking a run on the nation's banks. Governor Elvira Nabiullina decided to risk that in 2014 when sanctions over the Crimea annexation and slumping oil prompted her to switch the currency to a free float.

In response to this year's sanctions, Russia has enacted capital controls that also appear to be supporting the ruble. That includes freezing the assets held by nonresident investors, and telling Russian companies to convert 80% of the foreign currencies they hold into rubles.

This has some observers doubting the significance of the ruble's recovery to pre-invasion levels -- which is also happening amid the lightest trading volume in a decade. "It is not a free-floating currency given all the measures imposed by the authorities," Tresca said. U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said basically the same thing Wednesday when testifying before Congress, warning against drawing deeper messages about sanctions from the ruble's rebound.

Still, it's hard to ignore the lifeline other nations are tossing Putin by purchasing his country's oil and gas. Doing so gives Russia a current-account surplus -- economics jargon for exporting more than you import, which tends to lift a the country's currency -- and undermines the attempt to pummel Russia with sanctions.

"A current-account surplus should actually be another source of stability for the ruble," said Brendan McKenna, a strategist at Wells Fargo Securities LLC. "If energy prices remain high and major importers of Russian energy and commodities continue to purchase, the current account should stay in surplus."

	<p>Russia has been able to stabilize local markets and even stave off a messy foreign default -- at least for now. This means that if the coalition of governments who oppose Putin want to hurt the ruble again, they'll likely have to change tack. Just this week, the U.S. Treasury barred dollar debt payments from Russian accounts at U.S. banks, an attempt to make Russia drain its domestic dollar reserves or default.</p> <p>"As Russia's economy and financial sector adapt to a new equilibrium of capital controls, managed prices, and economic autarky, it is not surprising that some of the domestic markets stabilize," said Elina Ribakova and Benjamin Hilgenstock, economists at the Institute of International Finance. "Sanctions have become a moving target and will require adjustments over time to remain effective."</p> <p>They pointed to the likelihood of more tightening of financial sanctions, perhaps even disconnecting additional Russian institutions from SWIFT, the communications system banks use to move money around the world.</p> <p>Putin has been forced to change his war strategy in Ukraine, shifting troops away from Kyiv after failing to conquer the capital. Research firm Tellimer Ltd. is warning against trusting market rallies amid negotiations to potentially end the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>"Don't buy the peace rallies," said Paul Domjan, a senior contributing analyst at Tellimer. "Investors should be very cautious about market rallies following news about peace talks. There will be plenty of false dawns as the world valiantly seeks to end this war."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 War of attrition huge global consequences
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/07/politics/ukraine-war-of-attrition/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)The Russian invasion of Ukraine is transforming into a grinding war of attrition that portends months of more human carnage and will transmit shockwaves from Vladimir Putin's onslaught to millions of people across the globe.</p> <p>Rapid reassessments of the duration, character and costs of the war are being prompted by Russia's strategic shift away from a bogged down attempt to take Kyiv and topple the government to a refocusing of military force in southern and eastern areas.</p> <p>In the early days of the war six weeks ago, it seemed possible a Russian blitzkrieg could quickly storm the country and seize the capital. But fierce Ukrainian resistance, backed by Western arms, and heavy Russian casualties has led to a change of plan by Moscow.</p> <p>Yet the redeployment, which allowed a horrific trail of atrocities to be unveiled to the world, doesn't mean a vicious war that Putin cannot afford to lose is anywhere near over. In fact, it ensures that economic, political and international forces unleashed by the conflict will last for months and exact a deeper toll.</p> <p>Andrzej Duda -- the President of Poland, which borders Ukraine -- said in an interview with CNN on Wednesday that Putin's aim was clear.</p> <p>"The fact that civilian inhabitants of Ukraine are being killed shows best what the goal of [the] Russian invasion is," he told CNN's Dana Bash through a translator. "The goal of that invasion is simply to extinguish the Ukrainian nation."</p> <p>The consequences of Russia's ruthless mission will not be contained in Europe.</p> <p>Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, for instance, on Wednesday warned of "enormous repercussions" of the invasion for global food stocks and energy supplies. That in turn will create a chain of political consequences in the US and Western capitals.</p>

Most immediately in the US, the war's jolt to gasoline and grocery prices -- which had already risen on a tide of high inflation -- could have political implications, including for President Joe Biden's Democrats in the looming midterm elections.

A prolonged war will also have horrific humanitarian consequences, given Putin's strategy of razing cities and the apparent atrocities committed by his troops.

While the world has been revolted by images of dead civilians, some apparently executed in areas vacated by Russian troops, the horror unfolding in besieged southern and eastern cities may be on an even more vicious scale but will be harder for Ukrainians and foreign journalists to expose. This raises the prospect of impunity for some of the worst war crimes committed on the European continent at least since the Bosnian war, and possibly dating back to World War II.

Putin would test NATO with a long Ukrainian war

A long war will also provide a grueling test of NATO unity, following surprisingly strong resolve shown by the Western alliance.

It would also enshrine a second prolonged geopolitical joust between Moscow and the West. Putin will look for openings to open new divides between NATO partners as he seeks to bite off land in the east to fuel a claim of victory back home.

"The first part of the war is over and Putin lost the first part of the war, much to his chagrin," said Steve Hall, a former CIA chief of Russia operations, on CNN on Wednesday.

"I think we are going to be in this for the long run and I think this is going to be war of attrition. It is going to be very hard on Ukraine."

[Biden led warnings on Wednesday](#) that peace will be elusive for months.

"This war could continue for a long time, but the United States will continue to stand with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people in the fight for freedom," Biden told building trades unions in Washington.

His warning underscores that his entire presidency -- born in one crisis, a once-in-a-century pandemic -- is now likely to be defined by the West's second great standoff with the Kremlin. Political reverberations from the clash are likely to echo beyond the midterm elections in November and into the 2024 White House race. The fact that 63 Republican House members, many of them Donald Trump's top supporters, voted against a resolution supporting NATO this week will fuel fears that a return to the White House by the ex-President could fracture alliance unity.

Putin still wants 'the whole of Ukraine'

Warnings that the Ukraine war is now likely to be a semi-permanent crisis looming over the West were first amplified on Wednesday by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. The former Norwegian Prime Minister said that Putin's redeployment didn't mean he had given up his long-term goal of capturing Kyiv.

"We have seen no indication that President Putin has changed his ambition to control the whole of Ukraine and also to rewrite the international order, so we need to be prepared for the long haul," Stoltenberg said. "We have to be realistic and realize that this may last for a long time, for many months or even years."

The NATO chief was speaking ahead of a meeting on Thursday in Brussels at which alliance ministers will discuss their next steps in arming Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelensky has asked for tanks and heavy weapons. [So far, Western nations have mainly sent](#) anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons to Ukraine that have been effective in helping to repel the Russian advance.

But now the question is whether to send armaments Ukraine could use to push Russia out of the country, a decision that could further drag the West into the war. Biden has already blocked a plan by Poland to send Soviet-era jets to the Ukrainian air force.

"I believe that what NATO is doing is certainly not enough," retired Maj. Gen. Dana Pittard told CNN's John King on "Inside Politics" on Wednesday.

"The goal should be for Ukrainian forces to actually win. In order to do that, they'll need more than just tanks here, drones there, Javelin missiles. They need systems, they need training, they need assistance," Pittard said.

Then there are the broader questions that allied leaders may face about the need to further deter Putin in Eastern Europe, amid the constant fear that the war could spill over into a direct clash between the West and Russia.

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss late Wednesday called for a rethink of the Western security posture "The age of engagement with Russia is over. We need a new approach to security in Europe based on resilience, defense and deterrence", Truss said in Brussels.

Yellen warns of global economic reverberations

The world economy was already facing stiff challenges before Putin invaded Ukraine.

The pandemic badly disrupted global supply chains, helping to stir higher inflation. Now, severe sanctions on Russia's economy are not just punishing Putin, they are having a backlash in the countries that imposed them.

First, gasoline prices shot up with Russia shut out of much of the global oil market. Biden lashed out at "Putin's price hike" in an effort to conjure some political cover with voters already in a sour mood as midterm elections approach.

On Wednesday, Yellen raised the prospect of more prolonged global disruption from a lengthy Ukraine war.

"Russia's actions represent an unacceptable affront to the rules-based, global order, and will have enormous economic repercussions in Ukraine and beyond," Yellen told a House of Representatives committee.

She also warned that developing nations already facing heavy debt burdens and struggles to bounce back from Covid-19 could be especially vulnerable.

Ultimately, however, the prospect of many more months of war -- in a country severed by Putin's brutal invasion -- will test the courage, unity and staying power of Ukrainians themselves. The barbarity brought to light in recent days could be just the start.

Take, for instance, Mariupol, where thousands of civilians remain trapped in a city that has been reduced to rubble by weeks of Russian bombing.

"The world has not seen the scale of a tragedy like in Mariupol since the Nazi concentration camps," the city's major Vadym Boychenko said in a statement. "The ruscists (Russian fascists) turned our whole city into a death camp."

A war that grinds on for months or years could consign much of the country to the same inhumane fate.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Kyiv as a Russian defeat for the ages
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-battle-for-kyiv-dc559574ce9f6683668fa221af2d5340
GIST	WASHINGTON (AP) — Kyiv was a Russian defeat for the ages. The fight started poorly for the invaders and went downhill from there.

When President Vladimir Putin launched his war on Feb. 24 after months of buildup on Ukraine's borders, he sent hundreds of helicopter-borne commandos — the best of the best of Russia's "spetsnaz" special forces soldiers — to assault and seize a lightly defended airfield on Kyiv's doorstep.

Other Russian forces struck elsewhere across Ukraine, including toward the eastern city of Kharkiv as well as in the contested Donbas region and along the Black Sea coast. But as the seat of national power, Kyiv was the main prize. Thus the thrust by elite airborne forces in the war's opening hours.

But Putin failed to achieve his goal of quickly crushing Ukraine's outgunned and outnumbered army. The Russians were ill-prepared for Ukrainian resistance, proved incapable of adjusting to setbacks, failed to effectively combine air and land operations, misjudged Ukraine's ability to defend its skies, and bungled basic military functions like planning and executing the movement of supplies.

"That's a really bad combination if you want to conquer a country," said Peter Mansoor, a retired Army colonel and professor of military history at Ohio State University.

For now at least, Putin's forces have shifted away from Kyiv, to eastern Ukraine. Ultimately, the Russian leader may achieve some of his objectives. Yet his failure to seize Kyiv will be long remembered — for how it defied prewar expectations and exposed surprising weaknesses in a military thought to be one of the strongest in the world.

"It's stunning," said military historian Frederick Kagan of the Institute for the Study of War, who says he knows of no parallel to a major military power like Russia invading a country at the time of its choosing and failing so utterly.

On the first morning of the war, Russian Mi-8 assault helicopters soared south toward Kyiv on a mission to attack Hostomel airfield on the northwest outskirts of the capital. By capturing the airfield, also known as Antonov airport, the Russians planned to establish a base from which to fly in more troops and light armored vehicles within striking distance of the heart of the nation's largest city.

It didn't work that way. Several Russian helicopters were reported to be hit by missiles even before they got to Hostomel, and once settled in at the airfield they suffered heavy losses from artillery fire.

An effort to take control of a military airbase in Vasylkiv south of Kyiv also met stiff resistance and reportedly saw several Russian Il-76 heavy-lift transport planes carrying paratroopers downed by Ukrainian defenses.

Although the Russians eventually managed to control Hostomel airfield, the Ukrainians' fierce resistance in the capital region forced a rethinking of an invasion plan that was based on an expectation the Ukrainians would quickly fold, the West would dither, and Russian forces would have an easy fight.

Air assault missions behind enemy lines, like the one executed at Hostomel, are risky and difficult, as the U.S. Army showed on March 24, 2003, when it sent more than 30 Apache attack helicopters into Iraq from Kuwait to strike an Iraqi Republican Guard division. On their way, the Apaches encountered small arms and anti-aircraft fire that downed one of the helos, damaged others and forced the mission to be aborted. Even so, the U.S. military recovered from that setback and soon captured Baghdad.

The fact that the Hostomel assault by the Russian 45th Guards Special Purpose Airborne Brigade faltered might not stand out in retrospect if the broader Russian effort had improved from that point. But it did not.

The Russians did make small and unsuccessful probes into the heart of Kyiv, and later they tried at great cost to encircle the capital by arcing farther west. Against enormous odds, the Ukrainians held their ground and fought back, stalling the Russians, and put to effective use a wide array of Western arms, including Javelin portable anti-tank weapons, shoulder-fired Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and much more.

	<p>Last week the Russians abandoned Hostomel airfield as part of a wholesale retreat into Belarus and Russia.</p> <p>A sidelight of the battle for Kyiv was the widely reported saga of a Russian resupply convoy that stretched dozens of miles along a main roadway toward the capital. It initially seemed to be a worrisome sign for the Ukrainians, but they managed to attack elements of the convoy, which had limited off-road capability and thus eventually dispersed or otherwise became a non-factor in the fight.</p> <p>“They never really provided a resupply of any value to Russian forces that were assembling around Kyiv, never really came to their aid,” said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby. “The Ukrainians put a stop to that convoy pretty quickly by being very nimble, knocking out bridges, hitting lead vehicles and stopping their movement.”</p> <p>Mansoor says the Russians underestimated the number of troops they would need and showed “an astonishing inability” to perform basic military functions. They vastly misjudged what it would take to win the battle for Kyiv, he says.</p> <p>“This was going to be hard even if the Russian army had proven itself to be competent,” he said. “It’s proven itself to be wholly incapable of conducting modern armored warfare.”</p> <p>Putin was not the only one surprised by his army’s initial failures. U.S. and other Western officials had figured that if the invasion happened, Russia’s seemingly superior forces would slice through Ukraine’s army like a hot knife through butter. They might seize Kyiv in a few days and the whole country in a few weeks, although some analysts did question whether Putin appreciated how much Ukraine’s forces had gained from Western training that intensified after Putin’s 2014 seizure of Crimea and incursion into the Donbas.</p> <p>On March 25, barely a month after the invasion began, the Russians declared they had achieved their goals in the Kyiv region and would shift focus to the separatist Donbas area in eastern Ukraine. Some suspected a Putin ploy to buy time without giving up his maximalist aims, but within days the Kyiv retreat was in full view.</p> <p>Putin may yet manage to refocus his war effort on a narrower goal of expanding Russian control in the Donbas and perhaps securing a land corridor from the Donbas to the Crimean Peninsula. But his failure in Kyiv revealed weaknesses that suggest Russia is unlikely to try again soon to take down the national capital.</p> <p>“I think they learned their lesson,” said Mansoor.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Russia silences antiwar movement: kill you
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/we-will-kill-you-how-russia-silenced-its-antiwar-movement-11649237478
GIST	<p>Alexander Teplyakov wanted to speak out against the war in Ukraine but feared landing in prison if he took part in a public protest. So the Russian activist designed an antiwar sticker featuring Russian and Ukrainian flags and the phrase “NO TO WAR” and posted and distributed thousands of them around Moscow.</p> <p>He got into trouble anyway. Russian police hauled the 23-year-old into the Presnensky district police station on March 1, according to a copy of his police records reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. Mr. Teplyakov said he was repeatedly beaten over the head by one officer while in custody. A second officer pressed a pistol to his leg and coerced him into divulging the name of a fellow activist, he added.</p> <p>“He starts screaming at me to start writing,” Mr. Teplyakov said in a telephone interview. He said the police officer threatened him, saying, “We will kill you right now.”</p>

Mr. Teplyakov was sentenced to 10 days in jail after being convicted on a charge of disobeying the police, according to a copy of a court ruling. He left for Tbilisi, Georgia, the day after he was released from custody—joining [tens of thousands of Russians who have fled the crackdown](#) on dissent and the fallout of [economic sanctions](#) following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

A new Russian law prohibiting referrals to the military campaign in Ukraine as a war or an invasion and mass arrests of protesters have largely eliminated visible signs of dissent inside Russia against the war. Large numbers of Russians opposed to the war have chosen to be exiled.

The Kremlin has [welcomed the departures of critics](#).

"Many people are showing themselves to be what we in Russia like to call traitors," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in mid-March. "They disappear from our lives on their own. Some resign from their jobs, some withdraw from their professional lives, and some leave the country and move to other places. That's how Russia is cleansed."

The Kremlin can count on the support of many Russians. President [Vladimir Putin's approval rating rose to 83%](#) at the end of March, from 71% a few days before Russian troops moved into Ukraine, according to independent Russian pollster Levada Center.

What began as a robust protest movement in Russia, with thousands of activists taking part in protests or handing out antiwar literature, has now faded. The last major antiwar rally was on March 13, and the streets have been mostly quiet since. Small protests broke out and around 200 protesters were detained in several cities on Sunday after revelations emerged about [potential war crimes](#) in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, according to the OVD-Info, an independent rights group.

More than 15,000 antiwar protesters have been [arrested since the start of the invasion](#), OVD-Info said, and 900 of them have received jail sentences averaging 10 days. Independent Russian media has carried accounts of mistreatment of detainees and of people who say they were fired from their jobs for speaking out.

"They've instilled strong fear in people," Maria Kuznetsova, OVD-Info's spokeswoman, said.

Russia's Interior Ministry didn't respond to requests for comment.

Authorities have launched eight criminal cases under the new law that forbids the use of the words war or invasion to describe the conflict in Ukraine, said Damir Gainutdinov, head of the Net Freedoms Project, a nonprofit rights group. Among those charged include journalists, government employees, a style blogger and a 63-year-old pensioner living outside the Siberian city of Tomsk with 170 followers on her Telegram channel.

Net Freedoms Project has also tracked more than 200 cases of Russians charged—under an older law—with discrediting Russia's armed forces, a violation carrying a fine of up to 1 million rubles, equivalent to almost \$12,000. Repeat offenders risk landing in prison for up to three years.

One 25-year-old woman said that when she was detained at a Moscow police station after participating in an antiwar demonstration, a police officer said he would put her in a cell and allow other prisoners to rape her. The Journal reviewed a copy of her arrest record.

A representative of the police station said he wasn't authorized to comment. The Interior Ministry, which oversees the police, didn't respond to requests for comment.

"He said that we do not deserve to live in this country, that it's time for us to get out of here, that in Russia nothing will change, Putin will always be in power, we are traitors," the woman said. She was one of 3,400 people across the country arrested on March 6 for protests, according to the Interior Ministry.

In Vladivostok, a port city on Russia's Pacific coast, Anastasia Kotlyar is scheduled to be tried by a court in mid-April on charges of violating Russia's protest laws and refusing to cooperate with the police. She said she and her boyfriend plan to then leave the country as soon as possible.

Ms. Kotlyar was arrested on March 13, according to a copy of police records reviewed by the Journal. During her interrogation, she said a police officer slammed her head on the table. She suffered a concussion and spent six days at Vladivostok's Clinical Hospital No. 2, according to a copy of her medical report reviewed by the Journal.

The report said Ms. Kotlyar was "injured while being detained." Reached by phone, the hospital confirmed that Ms. Kotlyar had been hospitalized there. Vladivostok's police department didn't respond to multiple requests for comment. The Interior Ministry didn't respond to requests for comment.

The 25-year-old activist, who helped Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny organize [antigovernment rallies in her hometown](#) in recent years, said she has been fined and detained repeatedly for violating Russia's protest laws and thinks it is now too dangerous for her to stay in the country.

Kamran Manaflly, a 28-year-old teacher at Moscow's School No. 498, posted on Instagram that he would stand by his antiwar views after his school instructed teachers to push the government line on the war in Ukraine. "I don't want to be a mirror of state propaganda," he wrote on March 8.

Two hours later, he got a call from the school's director, Tamara Gorodzeyko, a Moscow city councilor, telling him to take the post down or quit. He was fired three days later, according to a copy of his dismissal letter reviewed by the Journal, for committing an "immoral offense."

Mr. Manaflly, who has since left Russia, said that two years ago Ms. Gorodzeyko told him she was proud of him for having gone to the U.S. to apprentice at a school there.

"It was a different country. Now you feel it in the educational system, in lessons. It's becoming totalitarian," Mr. Manaflly said.

Moscow's School no. 498 and Ms. Gorodzeyko didn't respond to requests for comment.

There are other factors that explain why the protest movement fizzled out. State control over the airwaves allowed the government to sell its narrative, which depicts the Russian military as liberating Russian-speaking areas of Ukraine from nationalists. Levada on Thursday published a poll showing that 81% of Russians back the military campaign, but it also found that 35% are paying "practically no attention" to the war.

The government also spent last year dismantling Russia's already embattled opposition. Authorities jailed Mr. Navalny for 3½ years, banned his organizations as "extremist," and closed several other opposition networks. In late March, a court extended Mr. Navalny's prison sentence by another nine years. All of his top lieutenants have been jailed or have fled the country.

"Putin deliberately destroyed all structures that could have built these kinds of collective actions. Now it's clear he did this because he was preparing for war," said Greg Yudin, a political scientist at the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences.

Not all antiwar activists are fleeing.

Dmitry Ivanov, the activist who Mr. Teplyakov identified as helping distribute antiwar stickers, said that while police officers haven't approached him he understands the risks of staying in Russia. The 22-year-old student at Moscow State University said the letter Z—which in Russia has become a symbol of support of the war—was recently spray painted on his front door. This claim couldn't be independently verified, but dozens of opposition-minded people have reported similar acts of vandalism since the start of the invasion.

	<p>Mr. Ivanov said he is focusing his efforts not on protesting but on private conversations with friends, colleagues, relatives and neighbors. He believes it will take time for real information about the war to bubble to the surface, saying facts such as the true fatality toll of Russia's soldiers will become clear only in coming months. While Russia has said 1,351 of its soldiers have died in the fighting, the U.S. has estimated that as many as up to 7,000 Russian troops have been killed.</p> <p>"This is my motherland, my country. I live here. I am a taxpayer," Mr. Ivanov said. "I don't see a reason to hide and run away."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 DOH: 1,464,398 cases, 12,544 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article260172905.html
GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported more than 5,000 new COVID-19 cases Wednesday, the result of a "data cleanup" ranging from January 2021 to January 2022.</p> <p>As of Wednesday, the state's preliminary death tally was 12,544. The confirmed death tally as of March 20 was 12,493.</p> <p>The statewide case total from the illness caused by the coronavirus stood at 1,464,398 cases on Wednesday.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 More Alaska Airlines flights called off
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/boeing-aerospace/more-alaska-flights-called-off-as-airlines-cancellation-wave-nears-one-week-mark/
GIST	<p>More than a dozen Alaska Airlines flights were called off Wednesday morning as the cancellation run that began Friday drags on.</p> <p>The airline, Seattle-Tacoma International Airport's largest carrier, had announced 17 new cancellations as of Wednesday evening, bringing the total number of flights canceled Wednesday to 37, about 4% of the airline's scheduled flights, according to FlightAware.com. Thirty-three Alaska flights scheduled for Thursday have been canceled, as have another 15 scheduled for Friday.</p> <p>Staffing shortages have been largely to blame for hundreds of cancellations that have delayed or stranded tens of thousands of passengers.</p> <p>While pilots are in short supply across the airline industry, Alaska has been hit harder by the pilot shortage than most of its competitors. The airline, in an increasingly bitter standoff with the union representing its pilots over a new contract, has lost dozens of pilots this year to other major carriers.</p> <p>Some stranded passengers reported 10-hour wait times on Alaska's customer-service line.</p> <p>In a statement Wednesday, the airline apologized to passengers inconvenienced by the cancellations and reiterated that a shortage of pilots was to blame.</p> <p>"The primary driver for cancellations is the shortage of pilots available to fly versus what was planned when we built our April schedule in January," a company spokesperson said by email. "Across the industry, airlines are seeing a strain on pilot capacity as air travel demand returns, airlines are all hiring, and it takes airlines are hiring faster than we're able to hire and train new pilots."</p> <p>Alaska and the union representing its pilots have been unable to reach an agreement on a new contract for three years. The dispute is currently the subject of federal mediation.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Biden: 'Amazon, here we come'
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2022/04/06/biden-amazon-union-labor/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON – President Joe Biden on Wednesday appeared to back efforts by some Amazon workers to unionize following a stunning labor victory at a Staten Island, New York, warehouse last week, as the president pushed his broader agenda to help more workers to join a union.</p> <p>The president did not directly call on Amazon workers to form a union, but gave his most explicit endorsement to date of the attempts to unionize the company’s massive workforce. Biden had previously called on Amazon to respect workers’ choice during a union vote in Alabama, and White House officials had spoken positively of the result of the vote in Staten Island.</p> <p>“Unions are about providing dignity and respect. ... That’s why I created the White House task force to make sure the choice belongs to workers alone,” the president said in a speech to the North America’s Building Trades Unions. Biden then lowered his voice and said: “By the way, Amazon here we come. ... Watch. Watch.”</p> <p>Biden added: “Workers who join a union gain power — the power over decisions that affect their lives. When you’ve got a union, workers’ voices are heard and heeded.”</p> <p>Biden’s speech to the trades union outlined the administration’s extensive efforts to promote union membership in the U.S., including labor requirements for infrastructure projects and other steps to require federal projects to be awarded to unionized workforces. He also emphasized that the building trades and groups such as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers were responsible for his election to the White House, both during the 2020 Democratic primary and as a candidate in the general election.</p> <p>Still, it remains unclear how successful the administration will prove at reviving America’s long-flagging labor movement. Union membership rates declined in 2021, the first year of Biden’s presidency, falling to its 2019 rate. (Government data show that trend was due in large part because nonunion workers were the most likely to lose their jobs during the pandemic in 2020, and then recover them in 2021.)</p> <p>An Amazon spokeswoman did not immediately return a request for comment. Amazon previously said it was considering filing objections to the Staten Island vote, citing “inappropriate and undue influence” by the National Labor Relations Board. Biden has appointed leadership to the NLRB widely seen as pro-labor.</p> <p>The obstacles to unionizing Amazon and other big firms remain large. Rapid turnover at Amazon’s warehouses complicates union organizing efforts, and efforts to unionize the company’s plant in Alabama have now been defeated twice. Amazon has roughly 1.1 million employees in the U.S.</p> <p>“Those are all good signs but I have yet to see real national indicators confirming there is an actual direct increase in labor strength, which I think is reflective that this is going to be a lengthy process,” said Will Raderman, employment policy analyst at the Niskanen Center, a center-right think tank. “The most recent data nationally does not reflect increased labor power.”</p> <p>Still, labor advocates were quick to cheer the president’s remarks. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters and AFL-CIO are among the unions that have said they will try to help Amazon union efforts.</p> <p>“It was a clear call of support to the multi-union campaign to unionize Amazon,” said Faiz Shakir, who served as the campaign manager of Sen. Bernie Sanders’ (I-Vt.) 2020 presidential campaign and has been lobbying the administration to be more outspoken in support of union efforts. “It’s exactly what working class people need to hear.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 On-site SEA parking full: spring break travel
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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/on-site-parking-at-sea-tac-airport-full-due-to-spring-break-travel/
GIST	<p>On-site parking at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport filled up on Wednesday afternoon due to spring break travel.</p> <p>Officials are recommending alternative ways to arrive at the airport, warning that parking areas at off-site facilities are also very busy or already full.</p> <p>Parking is congested with more passengers choosing to drive their own vehicles instead of taking transit or a ride share, according to Sea-Tac. Parking has also been reduced due to a garage improvement project and a recent fire, the airport said.</p> <p>According to Sea-Tac, spring break travel volumes are projected to be at 80% to 85% of pre-pandemic levels in 2019. Thursday and Friday are expected to be the busiest days, with up to 145,000 passengers traveling through the airport each day, the airport said. Daily passenger numbers were as high as 160,000 in the spring of 2019.</p> <p>Sea-Tac forecasts that passenger numbers in 2022 will be about 6% below 2019 levels, with nearly full recovery expected in 2023.</p> <p>“It may have been a while since your last flight through the airport, but do not underestimate how long your experience may take during peak travel periods,” Sea-Tac said in a recent news release.</p> <p>Other ways to get to the airport include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking Sound Transit’s Link Light Rail • Getting a ride with a friend, taxi or ride share app • For the daring, bike racks are located around the airport • Take a rental car back to the off-site rental facility, then take a shuttle bus to the terminal • If you are dropping off or picking up someone, use the cell phone lot instead of risking a citation from police for parking on the shoulder
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HEADLINE	04/06 Help wanted: adjunct professor, no salary
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/us/ucla-adjunct-professor-salary.html
GIST	<p>The job posting for an assistant adjunct professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, set high expectations for candidates: A Ph.D. in chemistry or biochemistry, a strong teaching record at the college level, and three to five letters of recommendation.</p> <p>But there was a catch: The job would be on a “without salary basis,” as the posting phrased it. Just to be clear, it hammered home the point: “Applicants must understand there will be no compensation for this position.”</p> <p>The posting last month caused an immediate uproar among academics across the country, who accused the university of exploiting already undervalued adjunct professors, and suggested this would never happen in other occupations. Under pressure, UCLA apologized and withdrew the posting.</p> <p>But the unspoken secret had been fleetingly exposed: Free labor is a fact of academic life.</p> <p>“These arrangements are common in academia,” Bill Kisliuk, a spokesperson for UCLA, told Inside Higher Ed when at first defending the job posting.</p> <p>Contingent faculty, the umbrella term for all kinds of generally part-time and untenured college teachers without much if any job security, make up a huge portion of the teaching staff of universities — by some estimates, around 70% overall and more in community colleges.</p>

They have long complained about the long hours and low pay. But these unpaid arrangements are perhaps the most concrete example of the unequal power in a weak labor market — in which hundreds of candidates might apply for one position. Institutions are able to persuade or cajole people who have invested at least five or six years in earning a Ph.D. to work for free, even though, academics said, these jobs rarely lead to a tenure-track position.

“If your theory is that association with UCLA is itself compensation, then it makes sense,” said Trent McDonald, a Ph.D. candidate in English and American literature and union organizer at Washington University in St. Louis. “I think there is the belief that you can eat prestige.”

Very often, adjuncts and other contingent faculty are asked to do unpaid work that is presented not as free labor but as a way to hone their own credentials, according to union activists and some instructors who have received such requests. It may be characterized as professional development or service. Professionals are sometimes willing to teach a class in their field for free so they can put the university affiliation on their business cards, said Joe T. Berry, a former adjunct and historian of contingent faculty.

And the instructors who are pressed into teaching without job security are often women or minorities, who began entering academia in force as the system was shifting to contingent faculty, said Berry, who recently co-wrote a book on the subject called “Power Despite Precarity.”

In a previous book, Berry said, he has a page listing all the terms that have been used for contingent faculty: One of them is “uncompensated.”

The union representing contingent faculty at the University of California has been fighting the uncompensated positions for years, said Mia McIver, the president of the union, which represents about 7,000 members.

“The fact that it is common does not excuse it,” she said.

The union suspects that the number of uncompensated teachers at the university is increasing, said McIver, who is also a lecturer in the UCLA writing program. “As of March 2019, we had identified 26 faculty members at UCLA alone,” she said.

In the California system, the trend seemed to have begun with the financial crisis of 2008, McIver said. By 2010, she said, “We became aware of people who had been laid off and who were teaching for free in the hopes, without any commitment from the university, that if the work came back they would be hired back to teach for pay.”

The union won a settlement with the administration in 2016 requiring compensation for lecturers, who are mostly part-time and make up the majority of contingent faculty, McIver said. But while lecturers are now unionized, adjuncts are not, allowing the university to have adjunct positions known as “0% appointments,” meaning that they are unpaid.

A spokesperson for UCLA, Steve Ritea, said that before the settlement, the people who taught for free were often full-time professionals with other income. He said he could not comment on the number of 0% appointments without seeing the documents the union was relying on. But he said that a typical example of a 0% adjunct is a tenured professor at another institution who has a formal affiliation with UCLA that might include mentoring students or serving on committees. Or someone who has moved to another university but wants to finish out a grant or a project.

The job posting “regrettably contained errors and a lack of context,” he said, adding, “We always offer compensation for classroom teaching.”

Even if someone takes a 0% position willingly, the union sees it as a disincentive for the university to create more secure positions.

“From my perspective, it doesn’t matter whether someone had another job or another position, or is a retired professor who wanted to come back and teach, or a refugee scholar who needed a position, or a postdoc doing research who wanted or needed to teach,” McIver said, rattling off possible justifications.

“Ultimately, all of that doesn’t matter because anyone who teaches at a university or any school, let alone the University of California, should be paid for their labor.”

Liza Loza, a graduate student in molecular microbiology and microbial pathogenesis at Washington University, was excited to be asked to teach a discussion section about four years ago. She had to do a lot of preparation, spending hours reading very dense scientific papers and anticipating students’ questions.

But she saw the job as her chance to make those discussions more hospitable to women and other students who had been shut out of the hard sciences. She remembered her own experience having professors who were so intimidating that she was afraid to speak, and she wanted to set a counterexample.

She was told that the job was unpaid because it was a professional development opportunity. She says the experience was valuable. “I did get a lot out of it on my CV, but also personally, as something that I wanted to help make better about the program,” she said.

Then last semester, in her third year of teaching the section, she found out by accident that graduate students in other departments were being paid \$1,000 for the same work.

“That was for me a bright line,” she said. “It just seemed sort of straightforwardly unfair once I figured that out.”

She wonders if she was lulled into working for free by the culture of academia, which drills into everyone that they are lucky to be there. “It is a privilege,” she said.

A spokesperson for Washington University, Joni Westerhouse, said graduate students in Loza’s department were required to have one “mentored teaching experience,” for which they were paid through their stipend. She said they were not considered contingent faculty.

Loza said she continued to teach beyond the requirement, and was not compensated for it, while others were.

In an indication of how widespread the practice of free teaching may be, the Twitter posts reacting to the UCLA job posting included one from Caitlin DeAngelis, a historian. In 2018, while being paid to work as a research associate on a project about the historical connections between Harvard and slavery, she said that she voluntarily taught a course, called “Harvard and Slavery,” normally taught by a tenured professor. She did so because she cared so deeply about the subject.

“The course was an extra responsibility added on (as a lectureship in the history department) that did not come with additional pay,” she said in a text message.

On Twitter, she expressed some regrets about agreeing to teach without salary. “In retrospect,” she wrote, “I shouldn’t have done it for \$0.00, but I wanted to get the info out to students.”

Harvard confirmed that DeAngelis had an unpaid lectureship in the fall of 2018.

Linn Cary Mehta is a longtime lecturer at Barnard and says she has seen a devaluation, even though adjuncts often have similar credentials to tenured professors. “When I first started we were called instructor and then lecturer,” she said. “The title changed to adjunct instructor, adjunct lecturer, almost aggressively, as if trying to put us in our place.”

	<p>Mehta, who has a Ph.D. in comparative literature from Columbia, has spent a career as a part-time worker because she needed the flexibility to care for her husband. She said that unionization at Barnard had provided increased job security through multiyear contracts, and higher salaries per course.</p> <p>Of the UCLA job posting, she said, “It’s insulting.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Russia mercenaries, Syrians to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/us/politics/russia-military-ukraine-war.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — As Russian troops retreat from northern Ukraine and focus operations on the country’s east and south, the Kremlin is struggling to scrape together enough combat-ready reinforcements to conduct a new phase of the war, according to American and other Western military and intelligence officials.</p> <p>Moscow initially sent 75% of its main ground combat forces into the war in February, Pentagon officials said. But much of that army of more than 150,000 troops is now a spent force, after suffering logistics problems, flagging morale and devastating casualties inflicted by stiffer-than-expected Ukrainian resistance, military and intelligence officials say.</p> <p>There are relatively few fresh Russian troops to fill the breach. Russia has withdrawn the forces — as many as 40,000 soldiers — it had arrayed around Kyiv and Chernihiv, two cities in the north, to rearm and resupply in Russia and neighboring Belarus before most likely repositioning them in eastern Ukraine in the next few weeks, U.S. officials say.</p> <p>The Kremlin is also rushing to the east a mix of Russian mercenaries, Syrian fighters, new conscripts and regular Russian army troops from Georgia and easternmost Russia.</p> <p>Whether this weakened but still very lethal Russian force can overcome its blunders of the first six weeks of combat and accomplish a narrower set of war aims in a smaller swath of the country remains an open question, senior U.S. officials and analysts said.</p> <p>“Russia still has forces available to outnumber Ukraine’s, and Russia is now concentrating its military power on fewer lines of attack, but this does not mean that Russia will succeed in the east,” Jake Sullivan, President Joe Biden’s national security adviser, said Monday.</p> <p>“The next stage of this conflict may very well be protracted,” Sullivan said. He added that Russia would probably send “tens of thousands of soldiers to the front line in Ukraine’s east,” and continue to rain rockets, missiles and mortars on Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Lviv and other cities.</p> <p>U.S. officials have based their assessments on satellite imagery, electronic intercepts, Ukrainian battlefield reports and other information, and those intelligence estimates have been backed up by independent analysts examining commercially available information.</p> <p>Earlier U.S. intelligence assessments of the Russian government’s intent to attack Ukraine proved accurate, although some lawmakers said spy agencies overestimated the Russian military’s ability to advance quickly.</p> <p>As the invasion faltered, U.S. and European officials have highlighted the Russian military’s errors and logistical problems, although they have cautioned that Moscow’s ability to regroup should not be underestimated.</p> <p>The Ukrainian military has managed to reclaim territory around Kyiv and Chernihiv, attacking the Russians as they retreat; thwarted a ground attack against Odesa in the south and held on in Mariupol, the battered and besieged city on the Black Sea. Ukraine is now receiving T-72 battle tanks, infantry fighting</p>

vehicles and other heavy weapons — in addition to Javelin antitank and Stinger anti-aircraft missiles — from the West.

Anticipating this next major phase of the war in the east, the Pentagon announced late Tuesday that it was sending \$100 million worth of Javelin anti-tank missiles — roughly several hundred missiles from Pentagon stocks — to Ukraine, where the weapon has been very effective in destroying Russian tanks and other armored vehicles.

U.S. and European officials believe that the Russian military's shift in focus is aimed at correcting some of the mistakes that have led to its failure to overcome a Ukrainian army that is far stronger and savvier than Moscow initially assessed.

But the officials said it remained to be seen how effective Russia would be in building up its forces to renew its attack. And there are early signs that pulling Russian troops and mercenaries from Georgia, Syria and Libya could complicate the Kremlin's priorities in those countries.

Some officials say Russia will try to go in with more heavy artillery. By focusing its forces in smaller geographic area, and moving them closer to supply routes into Russia, Western intelligence officials said, Russia hopes to avoid the logistics problems its troops suffered in their failed attack on Kyiv.

Other European intelligence officials predicted it would take Russian forces one to two weeks to regroup and refocus before they could press an attack in eastern Ukraine. Western officials said that President Vladimir Putin of Russia was desperate for some kind of win by May 9, when Russia traditionally celebrates the end of World War II with a big Victory Day parade in Red Square.

“What we are seeing now is that the Kremlin is trying to achieve some kind of success on the ground to pretend there is a victory for its domestic audience by the 9th of May,” said Mikk Marran, the director general of the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service.

Putin would like to consolidate control of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine, and establish a land bridge to the Crimean Peninsula by early May, a senior Western intelligence official said.

Russia has already moved air assets to the east in preparation for the renewed attack on the heart of the Ukrainian military, and has increased aerial bombardment in that area in recent days, a European diplomat and other officials said.

“It's a particularly dangerous scenario for the Ukrainians now, at least on paper,” said Alexander Vindman, an expert on Ukraine who became the chief witness in President Donald Trump's first impeachment trial. “In reality, the Russians haven't performed superbly well. Whether they could actually bring to bear their armor, their infantry, their artillery and air power in a concerted way to destroy larger Ukrainian formations is yet to be seen.”

Russian troops have been fighting in groups of a few hundred soldiers, rather than in the bigger and more effective formations of thousands of soldiers used in the past.

“We haven't seen any indication that they have the ability to adapt,” said Mick Mulroy, a former senior Pentagon official and retired CIA officer.

The number of Russian losses in the war so far remains unknown, although Western intelligence agencies estimate 7,000 to 10,000 killed and 20,000 to 30,000 wounded. Thousands more have been captured or are missing in action.

The Russian military, the Western and European officials said, has learned at least one major lesson from its failures: the need to concentrate forces, rather than spread them out.

But Moscow is trying to find additional forces, according to intelligence officials.

Russia's best forces, its two airborne divisions and the First Guards Tank army, have suffered significant casualties and an erosion of combat power, and the military has scoured its army looking for reinforcements.

The British Defense Ministry and the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank that analyzes the Ukraine war, both reported Tuesday that the Russian troops withdrawing from Kyiv and Chernihiv would not be fit for redeployment soon.

"The Russians have no ability to rebuild their destroyed vehicles and weapon systems because of foreign components, which they can no longer get," said Maj. Gen. Michael S. Repass, a former commander of U.S. Special Operations forces in Europe who has been involved with Ukrainian defense matters since 2016.

Russian forces arriving from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two secessionist statelets that broke away from Georgia during the 1990s and then expanded in 2008, have been conducting peacekeeping duties and are not combat ready, Repass said.

Russia's problems finding additional troops is in large measure why it has invited Syrian fighters, Chechens and Russian mercenaries to serve as reinforcements. But these additional forces number in the hundreds, not thousands, European intelligence officials said.

The Chechen force, one of the European intelligence officials said, is "clearly used to sow fear." The Chechen units are not better fighters and have suffered high losses. But they have been used in urban combat situations and for "the dirtiest kind of work," the official said.

Russian mercenaries with combat experience in Syria and Libya are gearing up to assume an increasingly active role in a phase of the war that Moscow now says is its top priority: fighting in the country's east.

The number of mercenaries deployed to Ukraine from the Wagner Group, a private military force with ties to Putin, is expected to more than triple to at least 1,000 from the early days of the invasion, a senior U.S. official said.

Wagner is also relocating artillery, air defenses and radar that it had used in Libya to Ukraine, the official said.

Moving mercenaries will "backfire because these are units that can't be incorporated into the regular army, and we know that they are brutal violators of human rights which will only turn Ukrainian and world opinion further against Russia," said Evelyn N. Farkas, the top Pentagon official for Russia and Ukraine during the Obama administration.

Hundreds of Syrian fighters are also heading to Ukraine, effectively returning the favor to Moscow for its helping President Bashar Assad crush rebels in an 11-year civil war.

A contingent of at least 300 Syrian soldiers has already arrived in Russia for training.

"They are bringing in fighters known for brutality in the hopes of breaking the Ukrainian will to fight," said Kori Schake, the director of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. But, she added, any military gains there for Russia will depend on the willingness of the foreign fighters to fight.

"One of the difficult things about putting together a coalition of disparate interests is that it can be hard to make them an effective fighting force," she said.

	<p>Finally, Putin recently signed a decree calling up 134,000 conscripts. It will take months to train the recruits, although Moscow could opt to rush them straight to the front lines with little or no instruction, officials said.</p> <p>“Russia is short on troops and is looking to get manpower where they can,” said Michael Kofman, the director of Russian studies at CNA, a research institute in Arlington, Virginia. “They are not well placed for a prolonged war against Ukraine.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 New glimpse into WA earliest Covid deaths
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/a-new-glimpse-into-wa-earliest-covid-deaths-and-why-we-may-never-have-a-complete-record/
GIST	<p>On the Saturday afternoon of Feb. 29, 2020, reporters joined local and state health officials, packing into a room for a news conference in downtown Seattle. Details were shared about what appeared to be the first COVID-19 death in the nation just the day before.</p> <p>It was a man in his 50s and a patient at EvergreenHealth hospital in Kirkland. He had underlying health conditions — and no recent travel history.</p> <p>“What we’re seeing is the tip of the iceberg,” Dr. Francis Riedo, EvergreenHealth’s medical director of infectious disease, said at the time.</p> <p>But we now know the King County man wasn’t the first in Washington — or in the nation — to die of COVID after all.</p> <p>In a recent review of the state’s earliest COVID deaths, the state Department of Health has confirmed at least four other Washingtonians died from COVID complications before or on Feb. 28, 2020. Three were from long-term care facility Life Care Center of Kirkland, the site of the first known coronavirus outbreak in the U.S., while DOH now believes the first person to die in the state was actually a Snohomish County woman in her 30s.</p> <p>And the first recorded death in the country has since been attributed to Lovell “Cookie” Brown, a 78-year-old Kansas woman who died on Jan. 9, 2020, according to The Mercury News.</p> <p>Bob Anderson, the chief of mortality statistics at a branch of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said in a recent interview that it has not been uncommon for authorities to have missed some of the country’s early COVID deaths.</p> <p>“We have seen quite a few death certificates that were amended with COVID-19 as the cause, especially those that occurred early in the pandemic,” Anderson said. “We probably underestimated them during that part of the pandemic because doctors often didn’t know what they were looking at and didn’t have a lot of experience with COVID-19.”</p> <p>In Washington, state epidemiologists and the King County Medical Examiner’s Office later confirmed John Edward Parker, a man in his 50s, and Marion Krueger, a woman in her 80s, died on Feb. 26, 2020. Philip Walter Rodenberg, a man in his 80s, died two days later.</p> <p>And the state’s first recorded COVID death occurred on Feb. 24, 2020 — four days before the state’s presumed first death. The woman, from Snohomish, had a travel history and underlying health conditions, said Kari Bray, spokesperson for Snohomish County’s public health department.</p> <p>But little other information is publicly available about her, as her death wasn’t investigated by the Snohomish County Medical Examiner’s Office.</p>

“Many (natural) deaths are not reported to us and it looks like this may be one,” Nicole Daugherty, the office’s operations manager, wrote in an email.

In early 2020, physicians and medical examiners who saw that viral pneumonia was a person’s cause of death might not have been able to detect whether the coronavirus had caused the illness, Anderson said. As the virus spread and affected people’s bodies in different ways, it became even more difficult to identify as a cause of death, he said.

Plus, he noted, testing wasn’t widespread at that point, so many COVID decedents were tested after they died.

While a few missed deaths likely won’t make a big difference from a public health standpoint, he said, it’s important to keep a record as accurate as possible.

“It’s important for people who died to have their cause of death specified correctly,” Anderson said. “... That gives the family closure, but then also corrects the permanent record. It’s important for tracking events over time.”

Since then, the state and country have developed much stronger disease surveillance systems to track COVID cases and deaths — though it’s likely there will never be a completely accurate pandemic death record, Anderson said.

In the case of the Snohomish woman, Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish County’s health officer, said she tested positive for the virus after she died. It wasn’t until May 2020, three months later, that a lab detected SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID, in a piece of her lung tissue.

“It certainly doesn’t change our current public health and disease control perspective on monitoring and guiding our way through the pandemic,” Spitters said. “More than anything, it just speaks to the reality of what it’s like to recognize a problem, then set up a surveillance system to detect the various outcomes.”

At the time, local health departments were tracking individual cases, hospitalizations and deaths, then reporting them to DOH.

Now, the process is more streamlined.

DOH compares new death certificate entries to newly positive COVID cases, then looks for matches and causes of death, Spitters said. If the cause of death and the COVID case line up, DOH will identify the death as “COVID-associated,” he said.

There are some gray areas.

If a person tests positive for COVID but has also been diagnosed with cancer or another disease, their exact cause of death might be more difficult to pin down.

In those situations, local health departments can request death information from hospitals or the medical examiner’s office to better understand the circumstances under which a person died, Spitters said.

“Surveillance systems for any condition are not perfect,” he said. “They’re set up to try and detect general trends. ... COVID is just another example of that.”

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HEADLINE	04/06 Seattle FD: tips for fire in apartment bldg.
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/reminders-from-seattle-fire-on-what-to-do-if-theres-a-fire-in-your-apartment-building/

GIST	<p>Recent apartment fires in Seattle have prompted the Seattle Fire Department to share tips with the public for reacting to a fire in their apartment building.</p> <p>Several people were rescued by ladder from an apartment fire in Rainier Beach early Wednesday morning. One man jumped from a balcony to escape and was taken to the hospital in stable condition. SFD said three units in the building are uninhabitable, and the estimated loss is \$130,000.</p> <p>Residents were also temporarily displaced in March, when there was a blaze at a Belltown high-rise apartment. One man was critically wounded during the fire and two other people were treated at the scene for minor injuries. A man was later charged with arson in connection to the fire.</p> <p>While alarms can be triggered from everything from a neighbor burning food to an actual fire, SFD says every fire alarm should be taken seriously.</p> <p>Here is what to do and know when evacuating apartment buildings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave your unit and close doors as you go • Use the stairs, not the elevator • Wait outside for instructions and do not reenter without permission • Do not wait on a balcony, courtyard or rooftop • If it does not delay escape, bring a warm jacket, phone, keys and other necessities • If it is cold enough, the fire department will call a public bus to serve as a temporary shelter. Otherwise, be prepared to wait outside for a few hours. <p>If it's not possible to use the stairs because of smoke or other reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter in place inside the unit • Keep doors and windows closed • Place a towel near the base of the door to keep smoke from entering • Stay near a large window and do not wait inside bathrooms or on a deck • Call 911 if smoke comes inside the apartment
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HEADLINE	04/06 King Co. looks for ways to support Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/ukraine/king-county-non-profits-discuss-aid-to-ukrainian-refugees/281-6d6fb83e-9ce4-48c5-82c1-7325d9cf8bda
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — After President Joe Biden's commitment to welcome 100,000 refugees, local nonprofit organizations are preparing to help.</p> <p>The crisis in Ukraine also has King County leaders calling for a comprehensive response. During a council meeting on Wednesday, members discussed legislation that would provide aid and support to Ukraine and Ukrainian people within the county.</p> <p>During the meeting, council members discussed the motion that requests the county develop plans to divest in goods and services that benefit the Russian Federation.</p> <p>"To get us to think as a county as how we might be directly or indirectly benefiting Russia in what is obviously an unjust war," said King County Councilmember Reagan Dunn.</p> <p>The King County Council's Committee of the Whole unanimously approved the motion to support Ukraine. It will be sent to the full council soon for a final vote.</p> <p>Council Relations Director at the Executive's Office Mina Hashemi said the county doesn't have any direct investments or contracts that benefit the Russian Federation or the Republic of Belarus.</p> <p>King County Executive Dow Constantine's office said they are following that and other motion requests. The county is working with government and nonprofit partners.</p>

Last week there was a local effort to delivered [\\$3.5 million in donated emergency supplies](#) including everything from medical equipment to gauze.

Now, local organizations are preparing for the arrival of Ukrainian refugees after the Biden administration announced plans to accept as many as 100,000 into the United States.

"We hope that the administration as well as all the decision-makers, and, and the leaders think through it and that they provide enough support, enough funding, enough resources for the resettlement agencies to be able to really welcome families in a very good and dignifying way, as they build their lives," said Medard Ngueita, the executive director of [World Relief Seattle](#).

Ngueita is unclear when and how many Ukrainian refugees will arrive in Washington, but World Relief Seattle is already making plans to welcome them.

This week, the [Mayors' Concert for Ukraine and Refugees Worldwide](#) that was held in Seattle raised more than \$350,000 and donations are still being made.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Seattle FD: 449 homeless camps fires so far
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattle-encampment-fire-response/281-836ac915-261e-43c5-b03e-1ce8db0efb75
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The Seattle Fire Department has responded to approximately 450 fires at illegal homeless encampments in the city since the beginning of the year.</p> <p>A large tent fire at an encampment on Fourth Avenue South at Edgar Martinez Drive South, followed by another fire at Fourth Avenue and Holgate Street on Wednesday were the latest crews responded to since Jan. 1.</p> <p>Before Wednesday's fires, Seattle Fire responded to up to approximately 449 fires between Jan. 1 and April 3. Not all fires got out of control, according to the fire department. The number of responses also includes calls for illegal burning.</p> <p>Between 2020 and 2021, encampment fires have more than doubled from 854 to 1,446, according to data from the city.</p> <p>Data from the city shows Green Lake is one of the most common locations for reports of encampment fires, along with SODO and Pioneer Square.</p> <p>The city continues to deal with a homelessness crisis that has spanned multiple administrations.</p> <p>Seattle's HOPE Team, the homeless outreach arm for the city's Human Services Department, saw a significant increase in the number of shelter referrals and enrollments in 2021 compared to 2020. However, despite the improvements, the team saw fewer than half of those referrals turn into enrollments.</p> <p>According to the HOPE Team's latest numbers, outreach members referred 1,072 homeless individuals to shelter beds across the city. Yet, just 512 of those individuals were confirmed to have enrolled in a shelter.</p> <p>In 2020, the HOPE Team referred 815 homeless individuals to shelter, but only 265 were confirmed enrollments.</p> <p>During the last point-in-time count prior to the pandemic, volunteers counted 11,751 people experiencing homelessness across the county, 53% of whom were sheltered. That was up from 11,199 people the year before, but still down from 2018's count of 12,112 people.</p>

	<p>King County skipped the point-in-time count for the past few years, with leaders saying the survey is an undercount and skews the narrative.</p> <p>Several high-profile encampments have been cleared over the past few months, including across from City Hall. Shortly before Mayor Bruce Harrell took office in January, the city cleared two large encampments at Ballard Commons and Green Lake Park.</p> <p>In his first State of the City address in mid-February, Harrell outlined some of the changes his office would implement to deal with the homeless crisis, including the consolidation of six different departments tracking outreach and services into one system as well the launch of a new system to record residents' encampment concerns.</p> <p>In addition, the King County Regional Homelessness Authority is spearheading a private-public partnership that involves the region's largest companies called "Partnership for Zero."</p> <p>The new approach will direct the efforts of various homelessness response groups from the Unified Command Center, which the KCRHA will lead.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Seattle activates first block-the-box camera
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-activates-first-block-the-box-camera/13353FGNXRBNTLBQJEHHWORNNI/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle's first camera catching drivers who block intersections went live Wednesday morning.</p> <p>The city is installing enforcement cameras in eight locations to automatically ticket drivers who use bus lanes or "block the box."</p> <p>After a thirty-day period for people to learn the cameras are in place, violators will first get a warning and then, starting with the second offense, a \$75 fine.</p> <p>"That seems pretty fair. Follow the rules of the road. We all took a drivers' test, we know what the rules are," said Courtney Coddington, as she passed Fourth and Battery, the intersection with Seattle's first block-the-box camera.</p> <p>"It's a real crisis of pedestrian safety," said Anna Zivarts, who heads the Disability Mobility Initiative at Disability Rights Washington. "What may be stressful or frustrating for (drivers) may be a matter of life or death for people who are outside of a vehicle and trying to cross."</p> <p>Leslie Hill is vision-impaired and struggles with blocked crosswalks.</p> <p>"You have to go around and squeeze into between cars and a lot of times they get mad," she said.</p> <p>In 2015, when Seattle traffic was worse, KIRO 7 reported on constantly blocked intersections along Mercer Street.</p> <p>At the time, the city was just beginning to research cameras.</p> <p>After the state legislature authorized a trial in 2020, Seattle is starting with eight locations.</p> <p>"We've looked for locations where there's a history of cars violating the rules of the road," said Ethan Bergerson of the Seattle Department of Transportation.</p> <p>There won't be any cameras on Mercer Street right away because city officials said new poles would have been needed, which would have taken more time.</p>

	SDOT officials said the cameras will also capture buses that block the box.
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HEADLINE	04/06 Seafair Summer Fourth returns Lake Union
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seafair-summer-fourth-return-with-fireworks-lake-union/YH6D5HXZTJFZDMBMAC7C4MAV4A/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — After a two-year suspension during the COVID-19 pandemic, Fourth of July fireworks will be back at Lake Union this year.</p> <p>Seafair Summer Fourth is free and open to the public. Organizers say this year’s celebration is going to be “bigger and better than ever,” with a fully choreographed show featuring more than 10,000 pounds of fireworks, along with a musical score.</p> <p>Before the fireworks show, there will be activities at Gas Works and Lake Union parks. Past activities included live music, interactive exhibits, eating contests, field games and vendors.</p> <p>Park gates open at 3 p.m. and the fireworks start at 10:15 p.m.</p> <p>There will be reserved and free seating options at both parks.</p> <p>For reserved seating, visit www.seafair.org/tickets.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Dangerous surge in homeless camps fires
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/project-seattle/homeless-camp-fire-near-seattle-stadiums-part-of-dangerous-surge
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The number of blazes that have been reported at Seattle's homeless encampments have risen to nearly five a day in the area, prompting safety concerns and worries about depleted resources.</p> <p>The latest fire was reported Wednesday morning just steps away from T-Mobile Park.</p> <p>From Jan. 1 through April 3, officials said the Seattle Fire Department has responded 449 times to homeless camps for fire-related incidents, including rubbish fires and illegal burns.</p> <p>That's an increase over last year when there were 290 encampment fires in the first three months.</p> <p>A fire department spokesperson said it is hard to quantify just how much time and effort goes into battling blazes at homeless camps.</p> <p>However, the fires are draining city firefighting resources with little indication of ending anytime soon.</p> <p>Before fire crews arrived on the southeast side of T-Mobile Park, Tim Emerson with We Heart Seattle had been checking on the homeless in the area and helping clear away trash.</p> <p>That’s when a fire suddenly broke out.</p> <p>“Turned around and saw a big billow of smoke,” Emerson said. “And it was just really alarming.”</p> <p>We Heart Seattle had been working with the group living near the ballpark to get them on the road to housing. Emerson said he rushed over to make sure everyone was safe and found out the fire started because of one man's drug addiction.</p>

	<p>“He told me he was inside the structure smoking dope out of a pipe with a butane torch and nodded out,” Emerson said.</p> <p>At that point the man apparently collapsed and the torch rolled into a pile of tarps, which burst into flames. “First of all, it is an absolute drain on resources and completely preventable,” said Kevin Dahlgren, the president of We Heart Seattle.</p> <p>Dahlgren said there are ways to keep these encampment fires from happening that aren't currently being done.</p> <p>“We house them or put them in sanctioned camping,” he said. “It's going to prevent a lot of this if not all.”</p> <p>Sanctioned camps could be more closely monitored and matched with wraparound services, which Dahlgren said could cut down on accidental fires. However, proposals to set up sanctioned encampments have stirred controversy and opposition by those who say the goal should be getting people into permanent housing.</p> <p>No one was hurt in this fire and fortunately the flames never reached the propane tanks and butane cans that were spread out around the homeless camp.</p> <p>Emerson credits the rapid response by the Seattle Fire Department, as well as We Heart Seattle’s ongoing efforts to pick up litter, to help keep the flames from spreading.</p> <p>“It was contained just because of the efforts of keeping the garbage clean out in the encampments around it,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Bird flu stirs concerns in local poultry farms
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/business/bird-flu-stirs-concern-among-local-poultry-farms-as-rising-prices-take-roost-at-grocers
GIST	<p>ARLINGTON, Wash. — A recent outbreak of bird flu that has been logged in at least 24 states in less than two months after the initial case was reported has stirred concern at the grocery store because of rising prices and on poultry farms in Washington state.</p> <p>Valera Storey, owner of Boujee Ranch in Arlington, sells chicken and duck eggs along with turkeys. She said this is the first time she’s had to worry about a bird flu outbreak.</p> <p>“It’s very scary, because it spreads so easily and there’s not much we can do to stop it,” she said. “So we’re watching where the outbreaks are happening.”</p> <p>According to reports, nearly 23 million birds have died in what is considered the worst U.S. outbreak of the avian flu since 2015, when more than 50 million birds died.</p> <p>The virus spreads from migratory birds like geese and swans, which Storey said there are hundreds in the area.</p> <p>Now she has to be extra protective of her birds by making sure there’s no food or water lying around to attract anymore birds that don’t belong here.</p> <p>“If you’re flock tests positive then all your birds are put down,” said Storey, who has owned the farm for the past three years. “It would wipe us and out and we’d have to start again.”</p> <p>The virus has been found in two dozen states, although Washington is not one of them so far.</p> <p>Even so, state agriculture officials are worried.</p>

	<p>"We should be very concerned because the virus is very highly transmissible," said Dr. Dana Dobbs. "And this point, we should be at state of preparedness, not panic."</p> <p>The rise in cases has also led to a 52 percent jump for the average price for a carton of eggs.</p> <p>Storey is raising turkeys but worries about what could happen come Thanksgiving.</p> <p>"So the supply will be short and it's going to be short on who can actually afford it," she said. "I know I'll have to raise (prices) from last year."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Concerns: Portland police intel-gathering
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/report-highlights-concerns-with-how-police-gathered-surveillance-during-portland-protests
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Ore. — The Portland Police Bureau gave no guidance to officers on what information they could collect on protesters, leaving many officers using their own discretion during protests in 2020, according to an audit released Wednesday.</p> <p>The audit, from City Auditor Mary Hull Caballero's office, looked at how the bureau gathered intelligence and conducted criminal investigations during the civil unrest in 2020.</p> <p>Officials reviewed a sample of 40 police reports of the roughly 1,500 related to the protests, as well as 33 Criminal Intelligence Unit reports and bulletins.</p> <p>The report found the Portland Police Bureau provided no guidance for officers at protests about what information they could collect, and that the Criminal Intelligence Unit did not limit access to its reports and kept them past their retention schedule.</p> <p>In five cases, the report found that officers collected info on protesters - like saving pictures or public social media posts - without documenting suspected criminal activity. That has the potential to stifle free speech, according to the auditors.</p> <p>Officials shared a video from Portland Police Air Support during protests in downtown Portland on May 31, 2020...(click on source link to view video)</p> <p>The audit addresses two concerns of many civil rights groups, that the police plane improperly surveilled protesters.</p> <p>Auditors say they found no proof the air unit collected cell phone data. Also, it said that people and cars also can't be identified in the plane videos viewed by the audit team.</p> <p>The audit also found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers collected information about protesters without documenting reasons • The Bureau held information about political activity without safeguards • The Bureau had technology capable of gathering personal information without policies and procedures to protect civil rights • Officers use social media for investigative purposes without direction; and • Better transparency may lower public's fear of airplane surveillance. <p><i>"Intelligence gathering and surveillance is by its nature an activity that the public doesn't know much about." Hull Caballero said. "However, more transparency through policies, procedures, and reporting will improve accountability and build trust."</i></p>

The audit gives PPB five recommendations, four of which have to do with updating policies or directives on surveillance, social media use, and technology.

The fifth is about publishing a report on the bureau's use of surveillance technology.

The police bureau agreed in part to two of the audit's recommendations, and agreed with the other three. Chief Chuck Lovell says the bureau would review existing policies, and those under review, to address the concerns. You can read his full statement below.

Response from Mayor Wheeler:

Dear Auditor Hull Caballero,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to your audit of police intelligence gathering. The people of Oregon have placed strong privacy protections on the ways in which law enforcement can collect and use information about the citizenry. I support these protections because of the very real history of shameful and biased surveillance practices by some law enforcement agencies in our state and nation. This history cannot be forgotten as we forge ahead with efforts to improve policing and work to earn trust between law enforcement and our community.

As Police Commissioner, my team and I will work with PPB to enact all five of audit recommendations, four in full and one in part. PPB's Policy Development Team will lead efforts to engage subject matter experts to ensure that all policies, existing or new, accurately reflect legal and procedural requirements. My administration will also continue to work with PPB to ensure these policies are implemented without delay.

Auditor, I appreciate your team's efforts and thoughtful consideration in making these assessments. Thank you for the important work you do.

Response from Chief Chuck Lovell (In Part):

We have reviewed the recent audit by your office regarding Police Intelligence Gathering and Surveillance. While we agree, fully or in part, to the five recommendations, we would like to provide critical, clarifying information in addition to our recommendation responses.

As we discussed with your team, the application of a Criminal Intelligence Unit (CIU) Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to the five police reports was incorrect as the reports cited were not criminal intelligence (a sixth was an outside law enforcement agency bulletin). These reports were filed appropriately, in RegJIN, in accordance with Portland Police Bureau Directive 900.00 General Reporting Guidelines. The retention of such reports is bound by State Public Records Law. This information was shared with the audit team but this assertion remained in the final report. A new directive regarding criminal intelligence will address the overall concerns expressed by the audit regarding the safeguarding of information.

In addition, the audit uses the term "searching" when referring to the use of social media by investigators. It's important to note that while common vernacular might include the terms "searching the internet" or "searching social media," the term "search" has a specific meaning under the law. The City Attorney's Office pointed out the constitutional significance of the word "search" and, moreover, that various court opinions have held that viewing open-source social media does not constitute a "search" under the Fourth Amendment. For clarity, when viewing publicly available social media information, it should not be labeled a "search" but instead a "query" or "viewing." The term "search," as it relates to viewing social media, should only be used to describe police accessing private information after obtaining a subpoena, search warrant, or court order.

As you will see the Portland Police Bureau is in the process of implementing several of the recommendations provided by your office as we continue to improve our transparency and trust-building.

HEADLINE	04/06 NATO nations differing paths on Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/world/europe/nato-ukraine-russia.html
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — Faced with the prospect that the war in Ukraine will be long and grinding, NATO countries are divided on how best to manage the next stage of the conflict and the uncertain period that promises to follow.</p> <p>Central European members like Poland and the Baltic states want a total break with Moscow and an effort to bring Russia to its knees, two senior Western officials said. They worry that anything that Russia can present as a victory will do serious damage to European security.</p> <p>But other nations believe that Russia cannot be easily subdued and that the war's outcome is likely to be messy — more exhausting cease-fire than resounding victory. Countries like France, Germany and Turkey want to keep contacts with Russia's president, Vladimir V. Putin, regardless of the allegations of war crimes committed by his troops, the officials said.</p> <p>NATO foreign ministers, meeting this week to discuss how to help Ukraine prosecute the war, do agree on one major point: The war is far from over and — as badly as Russia's forces have performed and despite their retreat from areas around Kyiv, the capital — they are making slow and brutal progress in Ukraine's east.</p> <p>"Moscow is not giving up its ambitions in Ukraine," Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's secretary general, said this week. "We now see a significant movement of troops away from Kyiv, to regroup, rearm and resupply. And they shift their focus to the east."</p> <p>That will take several weeks, officials believe, as Russian troops move back into Belarus to be resupplied and reorganized, and then must make their way with their equipment through Russia toward eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>"In the coming weeks, we expect a further Russian push in the eastern and southern Ukraine to try to take the entire Donbas and to create a land bridge to occupied Crimea," Mr. Stoltenberg said. "This is a crucial phase of the war."</p> <p>In response to the scenes of corpses in Bucha, the United States and the European Union are preparing more sanctions against Russia, but without much expectation that they will hasten the end of the war.</p> <p>But at the NATO meetings, the talk will be of weapons and matériel, not sanctions.</p> <p>There is a general agreement that Russia is no longer a strategic partner of the alliance, that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is no longer bound by the troop limits of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, and that its military posture must be sharply enhanced to deter a confrontational Russia, so long as Mr. Putin and his allies retain power there.</p> <p>There is also a commitment to continue aiding Ukraine — some two-thirds of NATO members have already provided lethal weaponry, including the Czechs' contribution of Soviet-era tanks and armored personnel carriers.</p> <p>But some stocks are running low in the West — U.S.-made Javelin antitank missiles, for example. And Ukraine is also going to need different weapons for the next phase of the war in the east, officials suggest, including longer-range artillery and more sophisticated armed drones, if they hope to push the Russians back, let alone drive them out of Ukraine.</p> <p>The amount of matériel arriving in Ukraine remains a secret, but officials say that the overall flow is very large and has made an enormous difference to the war. But what sort of weapons are most useful, and how to think through the possible conclusion to the war, is preoccupying alliance leaders.</p>

“On a number of fronts, we obviously have some changing battlefield dynamics,” U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, who is in Brussels for the NATO meetings, told reporters this week.

Mr. Blinken said the NATO meetings would focus on new ways to support Ukraine and to “put pressure on Russia,” and on Mr. Putin. More evidence of atrocities is likely to emerge, he said on Wednesday, as Russia pulls out of territories it controlled, “like a receding tide.”

On Tuesday, Mr. Blinken announced a further \$100 million worth of weapons and equipment from American stockpiles. Total U.S. military aid to Ukraine is worth some \$2.4 billion since President Biden took office and more than \$1.7 billion since the war began on Feb. 24, he said.

How the war might finally end is an important issue not just for Ukraine but for the entire alliance.

U.S. officials are skeptical that Russia is prepared to make real concessions in ongoing peace talks with Ukraine, although they do not rule out the possibility and want to ensure Kyiv’s leverage in the negotiations.

That is a key discussion. While Ukraine will decide for itself how and when to try to end the war and what it will negotiate with Moscow, President Volodymyr Zelensky and his government are in regular discussion with NATO country leaders, including the Americans.

“We believe that our job is to support the Ukrainians,” Jake Sullivan, the U.S. national security adviser, said this week. “We are not going to define the outcome of this for the Ukrainians.”

Some countries, especially in Central Europe and including Britain, are anxious that any sort of Russian expansion into Ukrainian territory, let alone a Russian victory, would embolden Mr. Putin, undermining overall European security and values such as the adherence to international law, respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity. They want Russia to be seen as the loser.

Even if the war ends with a new line of contact between Russian and Ukrainian forces, NATO aims to work with Kyiv to make Ukraine indigestible to Russia, as another senior Western official said. The point is to arm and train the Ukrainians so well that Mr. Putin would not wish to try again.

The foreign ministers will also begin a deeper discussion of NATO’s new strategic concept, the first since 2010, now in early draft. It is much tougher on Russia, and foresees a longer period of confrontation and expensive deterrence.

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HEADLINE	04/06 More Russians consider cost of Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-casualties.html
GIST	<p>Ivan Kononov, a senior lieutenant in the Russian marines, loved to cook. He made Italian food for his unit in the field, his brother said, and traded rations for spices when he was serving in Syria.</p> <p>The brother, Aleksandr Kononov, last saw him at the military hospital morgue in the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don in March. Lieutenant Kononov had died in a firefight for a steel plant in the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol. He was 34. Walking to the morgue, Mr. Kononov recalled, he passed the open gate of a warehouse and glimpsed dozens of black body bags lined up on the floor.</p> <p>It was only with his brother’s death, Mr. Kononov, 32, said in a phone interview, that he started paying attention to the war raging just over 50 miles from his home. And he realized, he said, that his brother had died in a war that “no one needs.”</p> <p>“If everyone learns everything, there will be protests,” Mr. Kononov, who works in a freight business, said, referring to the awareness of the Russian public at large. “And I think that would be for the best. Because this war has to stop. There ought to be no wars at all.”</p>

Six weeks after President Vladimir V. Putin's invasion of Ukraine, many Russians remain in the dark about the depth of their country's losses — and about the carnage and brutal atrocities that their military is inflicting as it retreats in the North. But increasingly, the reality of war is intruding in the lives of regular families when death notices and black body bags arrive, causing some, like Mr. Kononov, to question the war.

For others, though, the grim news of casualties is only hardening a determination to defeat Ukraine and support Mr. Putin's conflict with the West.

"If America didn't supply weapons to the Ukrainian Nazis, then there would be no deaths of our young guys," Aleksandr Chernykh, who lost his 22-year-old son, Luka Chernykh, a corporal in military intelligence, said in a phone interview. "My personal opinion is we should just whack America with a nuclear bomb and that's it, so that they stop getting involved in other countries' business."

Whether the growing personal pain of war weakens the public's resolve for rallying around the Kremlin could help determine the future of the conflict. Insisting that the invasion is only a "special military operation" and that no conscripts will be sent to fight, the government is still trying to avoid the impression that Europe's biggest land war since 1945 will demand widespread personal sacrifice from regular Russians.

A recent survey by the independent pollster Levada found that 35 percent of Russians were paying little or no attention to events in Ukraine; and on state television, the deaths of Russian soldiers are rarely mentioned.

Russia last announced casualties from the war on March 25, setting the count at 1,351 deaths. American officials [said last month](#) that a conservative estimate put the Russian death toll at more than 7,000 people.

The Russian service of the BBC on Wednesday said [it had counted 1,083 military deaths](#) that had been announced by local officials or in the local media across Russia. But 20 percent of those deaths concerned officers — a disproportionate toll indicating that vast numbers of deaths of lower-ranking soldiers may be going unreported.

The official silence about casualties recalls the Soviet war in Afghanistan. About that conflict, the Belarusian author Svetlana Alexievich later [wrote](#), "there were only rumors of notifications of death arriving at rural huts and of regulation zinc coffins delivered to prefabricated flats."

This time, snippets of news about deaths reach the Russian public in announcements by local authorities and universities and notices on wives' and mothers' social media pages. And when it does arrive, the grim news is most often cloaked in the official language of the war.

The governor of the Ryazan region in western Russia recently said that four men from the area had died "in the struggle against the criminal nationalist regime." In Ulyanovsk, a city by the Volga River, the wife of Senior Lt. Vladislav Lukonin of the 106th Guards Airborne Division posted that her husband had died protecting the "peaceful sky above Russia."

When the Industrial Pedagogical College in the western city of Klinty disclosed the death of a recent graduate, Aleksei Prigoda, who was 23, on its social media page this week, it said he "died participating in the 'Special Operation on the Territory of Ukraine,' fulfilling his duty to the Fatherland."

The next day, the college announced a music festival this weekend called "For Peace! For Russia! For the President!" featuring 10 local rock groups.

In the 1980s, the grinding war in Afghanistan eventually magnified the public's disenchantment with Soviet rule. A Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, formed at the end of the war to protect young men from abuse by the military, helped to shape a new civil society that pierced the state's silence.

But the Afghanistan war lasted a decade. Anastasia Nikolskaya, a Moscow sociologist, said she saw no evidence of battlefield deaths turning Russians against the war in Ukraine.

Unlike Afghanistan, she said, the Russian public is now being given a clear explanation for why their country is fighting: for their own security in the face of Western aggression, and against Nazism. (Mr. Putin falsely describes Ukraine's government as run by Nazis to justify the war). For the most part, she said, Russians are trying to avoid engaging with news of civilian deaths.

"We are trying to distance ourselves from such information," she said. "It's too hard to hear and know about this news. We can't do anything about it."

Committees of soldiers' mothers are still operating, but trying to stay out of the public eye given the state's repression of opposition to the war. They have been fielding inquiries from people looking for sons and brothers, as evidenced on their pages on the Russian social network [VKontakte](#).

"I haven't heard from my brother in a week," one man wrote. "Who do I contact? My neighbor was told yesterday she would get her son's body in the next few days."

In the southern Russian republic of North Ossetia, a reserve officer named Oleg Marzoyev has been tracking the deaths of all of the soldiers from the region on his accounts on Telegram and Instagram, writing that he was doing so because the government was not.

"You, who make these decisions, what are you trying to achieve?" he wrote last month. "People have a question: Why is there no proper attitude toward the memory of the dead?"

With war deaths growing, word of the dangers of fighting in Ukraine is filtering down through the public, and there have even been cases of service members trying to avoid combat.

Mikhail Benyash, a lawyer in the southern city of Krasnodar, said he has received more than 100 requests from Russian military and national guard service members about their legal rights should they refuse to fight.

He said he was defending three national guard members who protested the decision to fire them for rejecting the order to go to Ukraine. Nine others were pressured to drop the complaints, he said.

"They don't see a point in killing anyone," he said of the Russians who refuse to fight. "Plus, they don't see a point in being killed."

But for soldiers' families, the state's propaganda continues to carry influence. Mr. Chernykh, whose son grew up in a small town in Siberia and died thousands of miles west, near the Ukrainian town of Konotop, said he did not watch television news. Yet, he said Russia was fighting Nazis who were being supplied by the United States, and he dismissed the idea that his country's army could be responsible for the atrocities being uncovered in Ukraine.

"I know the Russian spirit and I know that Russians do not shoot at civilians," Mr. Chernykh, an engineer, said in a phone interview from the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk. "Only Nazis could do that."

In another Siberian city, Khanty-Mansiysk, a 38-year-old woman named Alina — she asked her last name be withheld out of fear of repercussions — also said she believed that her brother, a lieutenant colonel, had perished fighting Nazism.

Through tears, she said that a small group of Nazis in Ukraine was causing misery by encouraging the mistreatment of ethnic Russians. It was all an echo of World War II, she said, when some Ukrainians collaborated with the Nazis — a story line propagated at length on Russian television.

	<p>“This is a repeat of what happened before,” she said. “This is a repeat of this history.”</p> <p>For many others, there is the feeling of being at the mercy of events beyond their control. In North Ossetia, Marina Kulumbegova, 25, has been avoiding watching the news. Her father, Robert Kulumbegov, 47, left for eastern Ukraine on the first day of the war to deliver supplies to Russian troops, then stayed to fight, she said, “because there were boys there who were my brother’s age” — 23.</p> <p>“The only people who know what’s really happening there are the guys who are fighting there,” she said in a phone interview from the city of Vladikavkaz. “To talk about it, to say your opinion on it, has absolutely no use.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 New Russian land mine used in Ukraine?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/us/politics/russia-ukraine-land-mines.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Russian forces in Ukraine appear to be using a new type of weapon as they step up attacks on civilian targets: an advanced land mine equipped with sensors that can detect when people walk nearby.</p> <p>Ukrainian bomb technicians discovered the device, called the POM-3, last week near the eastern city of Kharkiv, according to Human Rights Watch, a leading human rights group, which has reviewed photos provided by Ukraine’s military.</p> <p>Older types of land mines typically explode when victims accidentally step on them or disturb attached tripwires. But the POM-3’s seismic sensor picks up on approaching footsteps and can effectively distinguish between humans and animals.</p> <p>Humanitarian deminers and groups that campaign against the use of land mines said the POM-3 would make future efforts to locate and destroy unexploded munitions in Ukraine vastly more complicated and deadlier.</p> <p>“These create a threat that we don’t have a response for,” said James Cowan, who leads the HALO Trust, a British American charity that clears land mines and other explosive remnants of war to help countries recover after conflicts. The group began removing unexploded munitions from the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine in 2016, after Russian-backed separatists started fighting the Ukrainian government.</p> <p>“We’ll need to find some donors to procure robotics that can allow us to deal with these threats at some distance,” Mr. Cowan added.</p> <p>The POM-3 is typically launched by a rocket and falls back to earth by parachute before sticking into the ground — where it waits, according to CAT-UXO, an online resource for military and civilian bomb technicians. When the mine senses a person, it launches a small explosive warhead that detonates midair, producing fragments that are lethal up to about 50 feet away.</p> <p>Mr. Cowan, a retired British Army major general, said his staff of 430 Ukrainians clearing unexploded munitions in Donbas had been unable to continue working since Russia launched a full invasion of the country in late February, with many staff members temporarily relocating in Ukraine. He anticipates that in the future, HALO’s operation across the country will require about 2,500 workers, given that many areas outside Donbas are now contaminated with unexploded munitions as well.</p> <p>U.S. government officials have said Russia appears to be moving troops to consolidate its hold on Donetsk and Luhansk, which could mean that even more weapons like the POM-3 will be used in the war.</p> <p>“The war is entering a static phase — trenches are being dug,” Mr. Cowan said. “This is the time when I would expect the Russians to start using land mines on a massive basis.”</p>

HALO, which stands for Hazardous Area Life-Support Organization, has about 10,000 employees around the world and is among the few international nonprofits that have remained in Afghanistan since the Taliban took control of Kabul, the capital, in August. Mr. Cowan said the future cleanup in Ukraine would require roughly the same number of workers as HALO's current operation in Afghanistan, which is recovering from decades of armed conflict.

The POM-3 is just one new hazard among many that his organization expects to encounter, in addition to an untold number of rockets, bombs and artillery shells that failed to detonate on impact. Russia has also attacked Ukrainian arms depots, causing fires and explosions that typically fling hundreds or even thousands of damaged munitions into surrounding areas.

Once widely used around the world, antipersonnel land mines often kill and maim civilians long after hostilities have ceased. Ukraine is one of the 164 nations that have signed a 1997 treaty banning the use of antipersonnel land mines and pledged to purge their stockpiles. The United States and Russia have refused to join it.

The treaty does not prohibit the use of antitank land mines — which typically have a much larger explosive charge and are designed to detonate only when a vehicle drives over or near them — nor does it address improvised explosive devices built to destroy vehicles. Videos posted on social media purport to show both antitank mines and improvised bomb attacks on Russian vehicles in Ukraine.

Russia's use of land mines was among the discussions at an event on Tuesday on Capitol Hill for the United Nations' international mine awareness day, which brought together groups that focus on the issue and lawmakers from Congress's Unexploded Ordnance/Demining Caucus.

"Wars end, they stay," Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont, said of land mines and unexploded munitions. "The targets are invariably civilians, and they are in places where you have a limited ability to provide lifesaving medical care."

"Look at what's happening in Ukraine — Russia is placing land mines in people's homes, as well as children's playgrounds and places where people go," Mr. Leahy said. "That's using it as a weapon of terror."

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HEADLINE	04/06 No charges on police Amir Locke shooting
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/us/amir-locke-shooting-no-charges.html
GIST	<p>The Minneapolis police officer who shot and killed Amir Locke, a Black man, during an early-morning raid in February at an apartment complex will not face criminal charges, prosecutors announced on Wednesday.</p> <p>The shooting drew thousands of protesters to the streets and renewed calls for police accountability in the city where George Floyd was murdered.</p> <p>Even as the killing provoked new rounds of condemnation against the Minneapolis Police Department and the mayor who oversees it, criminal charges were seen by legal experts as unlikely. That is because Mr. Locke, who was awakened by officers entering the apartment under a no-knock warrant, was holding his own handgun. Mr. Locke owned the gun legally.</p> <p>Mr. Locke was 22 when he was killed. He was an aspiring musician. His father, Andre Locke, said in an emotional news conference after the shooting that his son had been days away from moving to Texas to live near his mother.</p> <p>"Amir Locke's life mattered," Attorney General Keith Ellison of Minnesota and Michael Freeman, the Hennepin County attorney, said in a joint statement. "He was a young man with plans to move to Dallas,</p>

where he would be closer to his mom and — he hoped — build a career as a hip-hop artist, following in the musical steps of his father.”

In announcing they would not file charges, the prosecutors were critical of the raid that the police carried out with a no-knock warrant, but said they would not be able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the officer had committed a crime in violation of Minnesota law that allows officers to use deadly force in certain situations.

In a graphic, and short, video clip from a police body-worn camera that was released in the aftermath of the killing, Mr. Locke is seen under a blanket on the couch where he was sleeping, clearly groggy and startled as he raises a gun that he held in his hand.

Mr. Locke was not a suspect on the warrant, which was being carried out in connection with a homicide investigation in nearby St. Paul. But after the killing, the Police Department’s first statement about it described Mr. Locke as a suspect — a misstatement that fueled anger in the community and drew comparisons to the department’s first, misleading, statement about Mr. Floyd, which said he died after a medical emergency. (A cousin of Mr. Locke’s was later arrested in connection with the St. Paul homicide.)

“Amir Locke was a victim,” Mr. Ellison said at a news conference on Wednesday. “He never should have been called a suspect.”

In a region still shaken by the murder of Mr. Floyd, as well as the police killing of Daunte Wright, a Black man, in the Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Center last year, the killing of Mr. Locke reopened wounds in the community that were still raw.

Mr. Locke’s killing also brought renewed scrutiny to a department that is still depleted from the exodus of hundreds of officers in the aftermath of Mr. Floyd’s murder, and one that is still struggling to enact reforms and rebuild trust with the community.

During the investigation of the raid, Mark Hanneman, the officer who killed Mr. Locke, told investigators that when he saw Mr. Locke’s gun, he feared for his life, and that he had acted quickly because he felt his life was in jeopardy. Mr. Hanneman, 34, was placed on administrative duty after the shooting but has since returned to his regular job, according to the Police Department.

Mr. Ellison, while stressing that the law did not support criminal charges in the case, used the news conference on Wednesday to push for more legislation to overhaul policing, and he expressed exasperation at the slow pace of change, especially in the wake of Mr. Floyd’s death.

“The problems involving policing and communities of color in Minneapolis are longstanding, and everyone knows it, yet it feels like nothing is ever done about it,” he said.

He urged residents who have been pushing for police reform not to let up.

“This is not the time for people to feel like there’s no hope,” Mr. Ellison said. “There is. People should carry forward and continue to try to make the system one we can all be proud of.”

The decision not to file criminal charges does not mean the end of the matter. The Locke family, which met with the prosecutors on Wednesday morning, has hired Benjamin Crump, the civil rights lawyer, to pursue a lawsuit against the city and to push the city to make changes to its Police Department.

At a news conference in New York on Wednesday, Karen Wells, Mr. Locke’s mother, stood next to Mr. Crump and the Rev. Al Sharpton and addressed the officer who killed her son: “The spirit of my baby is going to haunt you for the rest of your life.”

She also delivered pointed remarks directed at Mayor Jacob Frey, over his management of the department and over the city’s surge in violent crime, which, she said, led Mr. Locke to obtain a gun for protection.

“My son was protecting himself, thinking he had to protect himself from all the crime that is out of control, Mayor Frey, the mayor of Minneapolis, that you can’t control,” she said. “So my son decided that if he’s going to go back and forth and do Instacart and DoorDash, he needed to bear arms, the legal way.”

That Mr. Locke was killed as police officers used a no-knock warrant, a law enforcement tactic that was heavily criticized in the wake of the police killing of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Ky., in 2020 during a botched raid, only added to the anger in Minneapolis.

Mr. Frey had already limited the use of no-knock warrants, but the killing of Mr. Locke drew accusations that the mayor had misled the public during his campaign for re-election last year when he claimed to have banned such warrants. In response to Mr. Locke’s killing, the mayor issued a new policy this week, which prohibits no-knock warrants and requires officers to knock and announce their presence, and then wait, before entering a building.

“This policy is among the most forward-looking and extensive in the nation, and will help keep both our residents and officers safe,” Mr. Frey said in a statement.

Just as Mr. Wright was killed during the trial last year of Derek Chauvin, the officer who was convicted of murdering Mr. Floyd, the killing of Mr. Locke occurred during a federal trial in St. Paul, Minn., for the other three officers involved in Mr. Floyd’s death. Those three officers were all found guilty of violating Mr. Floyd’s constitutional rights.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Texas governor targets migrants at border
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/us/greg-abbott-texas-border-migrants.html
GIST	<p>HOUSTON — Gov. Greg Abbott said on Wednesday that Texas would set up checkpoints to stop commercial vehicles coming from Mexico and would charter buses to bring migrants released by federal agents north to Washington, ushering in a new phase in an increasingly pitched political clash over immigration policy.</p> <p>The tug of war over border policy has been politically advantageous for the governor in his re-election campaign, his political aides have said, and reflects real concern among Texas officials and voters that not enough has been done to address the surging number of migrant encounters at the border.</p> <p>The twin imperatives — security and politics — were on display in a news conference as Mr. Abbott lashed out at the Biden administration and promised that the first migrants who agreed to be bused from Texas to Washington would be dropped at the doorstep of federal lawmakers.</p> <p>“The first location” for drop-off, he said, “will be the steps of the United States Capitol.”</p> <p>Since President Biden took office, Mr. Abbott, a Republican who is running for his third term in November, has sought ways to increase the involvement of Texas law enforcement along the border, engaging in a broad expansion of state efforts to stop and, in some cases, arrest migrants.</p> <p>Mr. Abbott’s announcement on Wednesday took those efforts further and, he said, was only one part of the state’s response to a change in federal policy that is expected to bring an increase in migrants arriving at the border.</p> <p>National Guard troops, he said, would begin “mass migration rehearsals” this week, including with riot gear, to prepare for an influx of the type that overwhelmed officials in Del Rio last fall. The troops, along with state police, would also create “boat blockades” in areas of the Rio Grande, officials said.</p> <p>The moves by Texas come as the Biden administration is preparing to end a Trump-era policy initiated during the coronavirus pandemic in which migrants were turned away at the border under an emergency</p>

public health order known as Title 42. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said the order would be lifted in late May.

The order, which allows federal immigration officials to turn away migrants, including those seeking asylum, has been used roughly 1.7 million times to expel migrants over the past two years.

Federal officials expect that the lifting of the order could result in thousands of migrants arriving daily at the southern border, which has already seen a significant rise in illegal crossings.

While the federal government enforces immigration law, Mr. Abbott has found ways to insert the state into immigration matters. Last year, he directed state police to begin an unusual program of arresting migrants caught on private land with misdemeanor trespassing. Thousands were detained, with some waiting months for court hearings.

The checkpoints follow a similar model, making novel use of a state law enforcement function — commercial vehicle safety inspections — to stop those arriving from Mexico. It was not immediately clear when the checkpoints would be established or how many would be involved.

“This is going to dramatically slow traffic from Mexico into Texas,” Mr. Abbott said.

Officials said that those who volunteered to be bused to Washington by the state would be migrants who had been released from federal custody into the United States.

“They’ve been dumping large numbers of migrants in cities up and down the border,” he said of the federal government. Officials in those cities, he added, have already been placing some migrants on buses to San Antonio.

“So I said I’ve got a better idea: As opposed to busing these people to San Antonio, let’s continue the ride all the way to Washington, D.C.,” Mr. Abbott said.

Former Representative Beto O’Rourke, the Democratic candidate for governor, was not impressed.

“If Abbott focused on solutions instead of stunts, then Texas could have made some real progress on this issue over the last seven years.”

Officials presented few details about how their plan would work. Asked at the news conference how many buses would be used, the head of the Texas Division of Emergency Management, W. Nim Kidd, could not say. “We will use as many buses as necessary,” Mr. Kidd said.

A spokesman for the department said that the number of buses needed would depend on requests from local officials, and that migrants could be taken to other areas outside of Texas, not only Washington.

The effort echoed a bill introduced last year by Senator Ted Cruz, a Republican, to send migrants arriving in South Texas to Democratic states in the Northeast and in California.

Representative Sylvia Garcia, a Houston Democrat, called Mr. Abbott’s announcement “shameful.”

“These are families escaping desperate poverty, ruthless violence and life-threatening situations,” she said. “They could contribute greatly to Texas if they were welcomed, like Texans are supposed to do.”

Mr. Abbott has also built miles of fencing and other barriers and deployed thousands of National Guard members along the border, a mission that is expected to cost \$2 billion annually. The leaders of the Texas Military Department said this week that the effort, which began last year, had been costlier than anticipated and that they would need an additional \$500 million to keep it running.

	<p>But the governor has faced pressure from some conservatives to go further and declare an “invasion” under a clause in the U.S. Constitution that proponents believe would give Texas officials the authority to turn back migrants arriving at the border.</p> <p>Mr. Abbott denied he had plans to do so when asked at the news conference, but added that “there will be more announcements next week.”</p> <p>“Texas is evaluating every tool that we can possibly use,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 US trains Ukraine troops on armed drones
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/world/europe/us-ukraine-switchblade-drones.html
GIST	<p>With the Biden administration sending dozens of armed drones to Ukraine, the Pentagon is training Ukrainian soldiers in the United States to use the weapons to attack Russian tanks and other armored vehicles.</p> <p>Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III disclosed the training for the first time in House testimony on Tuesday. Pentagon officials offered more details on Wednesday about what the military calls Switchblade drones and how U.S. officials are instructing a cadre of Ukrainian troops to use them on the battlefield.</p> <p>The Pentagon announced last month that it was sending 100 Switchblade drones to Ukraine as part of a \$800 million military aid package to Ukraine. More are on the way. Military officials call the weapon, which is carried in a backpack, the “kamikaze drone,” because it can be flown directly at a tank or a group of troops and is destroyed when it hits the target and explodes.</p> <p>Bigger armed drones, like U.S.-made Predators or Reapers, would be difficult for Ukrainians to fly and would be easily destroyed by Russian fighter planes. But Pentagon officials said the small, portable kamikaze drones could prove to be a more cost-effective and elusive weapon against Russian armored convoys.</p> <p>When Pentagon officials realized that about a dozen Ukrainian soldiers had arrived in the United States on an educational assignment that was scheduled long before the February invasion, they decided to give the troops a quick course on using the killer drones.</p> <p>“We took the opportunity, having them still in the country, to give them a couple of days’ worth of training on the Switchblade,” John F. Kirby, the chief Pentagon spokesman, said on Wednesday. Mr. Kirby said the Ukrainians did not typically use this weapon, but he noted that it is easy to learn.</p> <p>“An individual could be suitably trained on how to use the Switchblade drone in about two days or so,” he said.</p> <p>The Ukrainian soldiers are wrapping up their impromptu drone training at a military base in the southern United States that officials would not identify for security reasons. By the time they arrive back home in the coming days, officials said, the Switchblades will be waiting for them.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Officials: civilians fleeing eastern Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/world/europe/ukraine-civilians-moscow-war.html
GIST	<p>Spurred by reports of Russian atrocities outside Ukraine’s capital, and alarmed at signs that Russia’s invasion force is about to escalate assaults in eastern Ukraine, many civilians in that region are fleeing while they can, officials said Wednesday.</p> <p>“The cities of the Luhansk region are in ruins,” warned one eastern governor. “Thousands of residents have not yet left. Get out of the way!”</p>

The exodus accelerated as Western nations moved to provide more weapons to Ukraine's military and further ostracize Russia economically with new sanctions, including restrictions on its leading banks and on the assets of President Vladimir V. Putin's children.

The new sanctions are a response to outrage and revulsion over the atrocities, including executions and torture, that appear to have been carried out by Russian forces before they retreated from areas outside Kyiv in the past few weeks. Russia has denied responsibility, saying the atrocities were fabricated or were committed by the Ukrainians themselves.

The European Union also was weighing a ban on coal from Russia, the leading provider of fossil-fuel energy to Europe, and Russia appeared to move closer to default on its foreign debt because of U.S. currency restrictions.

"Together with our allies and our partners, we're going to keep raising the economic costs and ratchet up the pain for Putin, and further increase Russia's economic isolation," said President Biden, who has described Mr. Putin as a war criminal and suggested he should not remain in power.

More than 11 million Ukrainians — roughly one in four — have fled their homes since the Feb. 24 invasion, according to the United Nations, including more than four million who have fled the country. It is the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.

The Russian military announced last week that it would focus its campaign on [eastern Ukraine](#), where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting for eight years. The redeployment came as the Russians, hampered by botched planning and fierce Ukrainian military resistance, retreated from the Kyiv area and apparently abandoned — at least for now — any effort to capture the capital in their war to subjugate the former Soviet republic.

Western military analysts have said the Russians vastly underestimated the challenges in Ukraine and that their initial invasion force of more than 150,000 has been weakened by losses, exhaustion and low morale. But that does not mean Russia's military cannot undertake a powerful new assault in eastern Ukraine.

The shift has accelerated civilian displacement in the east. Thousands of people have been leaving, according to Ukrainian officials, and photos and videos posted online. Ukrainian officials say Russian troops have been massing in the Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv regions.

In Kramatorsk, a city in the north of the Donetsk region, photos showed crowds of people huddled at a platform in a central train station.

At least two people were killed and five injured when Russian forces launched a strike on a humanitarian aid site in the town of Vugledar in the Donetsk region, according to Pavlo Kyrylenko, the Donetsk governor.

Russian forces now control 60 percent of the town of Rubizhne, in the Luhansk region, according to the governor there, Serhiy Haidai, who said the attackers had scaled up their offensive this week.

"Evacuations are taking place under the roar of enemy guns," Mr. Haidai wrote in a Facebook post on Wednesday, saying that approximately 30,000 people had left the region since Russia invaded. He urged remaining residents to flee before Russia scaled up attacks.

Oleg Synegubov, the state administrator for the Kharkiv military region, said Wednesday in a post on Telegram that the army would evacuate two towns in the eastern part of the country because fighting was escalating there.

The towns, Lozova and Barvinkove, are southwest of Izium, a city Russian forces seized as part of an apparent drive toward Sloviansk, which military analysts say is strategically critical to Russia's plan to gain full control of eastern Ukraine.

Earlier this week, Oleksiy Danilov, the head of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, speaking on national television, said "large groupings of Russian troops" had been massing in the region.

"They are not going to stop," he said. "They have a great desire to create big problems for our armed forces in this direction, and we also expect that fierce battles will be fought there for our territory in the near future."

The Pentagon's assessment of Russian deployments appeared to corroborate what Ukrainian officials were saying. Pentagon officials said Russia had withdrawn all of its troops arrayed against Kyiv and another city in the north, Chernihiv, and sent them back to Russia or to its ally Belarus to rearm, resupply and possibly redeploy in eastern Ukraine.

The Pentagon officials said those forces included as many as 40,000 troops that, in many cases, had departed under fierce attack from the Ukrainian military units that retook the territory.

"We believe they are all out," one senior Pentagon official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss confidential operational issues.

Russia now has about 30 battalion tactical groups — as many as 30,000 troops — in the east, the senior Pentagon official said. Earlier this week, Jake Sullivan, Mr. Biden's national security adviser, said Russia would most likely send "tens of thousands of soldiers to the front line in Ukraine's east" in the coming weeks.

Largely in anticipation of this next major phase of the war, the Pentagon announced late Tuesday that it was sending \$100 million worth of Javelin anti-tank missiles — roughly several hundred missiles — to Ukraine, where the weapon has been used with high success in destroying Russian tanks and other armored vehicles.

NATO foreign ministers, meeting this week, have been discussing how to further help Ukraine prosecute the war without entangling the alliance in direct combat with Russian forces.

The war, they said, is far from over, noting that however badly Russia's forces have performed, and their retreat from areas around Kyiv notwithstanding, they are making slow and brutal progress in the east.

"Moscow is not giving up its ambitions in Ukraine," said Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's secretary general.

Ukrainian officials in a number of areas, including Mykolayiv in the south and the Luhansk and Donetsk regions in the east, have been sharing schedules of planned evacuations or links to online portals for people to sign up to join buses and trains that are transporting residents to safer places.

But in some besieged cities in the south, like Mariupol, it is already nearly impossible to leave, making evacuations sporadic and risky.

Attempts by the Red Cross to enter Mariupol to supervise civilian departures have repeatedly been scrubbed, leaving fearful residents to fend for themselves. On Wednesday, 500 people who had escaped Mariupol to join a Red Cross convoy in the nearby city of Berdyansk arrived in Zaporizhzhia, about 100 miles away.

The climate of fear gripping Mariupol has spread to the region of Kherson, near the Black Sea, where people have lived under occupation by Russian forces since they encircled and entered the city and its suburbs on March 2.

“Anyone who did not leave early is now stuck here,” said Evgeniya Selivantseva, a doctor from Velyka Lepetyka, a village on the Dnipro River, in the Kherson region.

Dr. Selivantseva, 38, described a deepening humanitarian crisis in the village: Gasoline stations have run out of fuel, and food and medical supplies are running low. Food is so scarce that local leaders have started a makeshift flour mill.

“We feel helpless and totally defenseless,” she said. “People are afraid to leave their homes.”

The proposed European Union ban on Russian coal, part of the bloc’s effort to further penalize Russia over atrocities in Ukraine, reflected a choice of an imported energy source that would be the easiest to replace.

Deliberations over the ban and other sanctions were set to continue into Thursday, and European Union officials and diplomats anticipated that the measures would be approved. The process reflected the challenges of reaching agreement among all 27 member nations on the penalties, which would also include banning Russian ships from E.U. ports.

If approved, the sanctions would be the harshest enforced by the bloc since the invasion.

Though the European Union depends on Russian coal, the bloc could find substitute imports more easily than for natural gas and oil.

But banning coal from Russia could send energy prices soaring for European consumers, given the existing shortages in the bloc, according to Rystad Energy, a consulting firm. Carlos Torres Diaz, a senior vice president at Rystad, called the potential sanctions “a double-edged sword.”

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HEADLINE	04/06 Latin America easing restrictions too soon?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/06/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?name=stylncoronavirus&region=hub&block=storyline_live_updates_block_recirc&action=click&pgtype=LegacyCollection#who-warns-against-relaxing-restrictions-too-quickly-in-latin-america
GIST	<p>World Health Organization officials on Wednesday expressed concerns that some countries in the Americas were prematurely scaling back policies to control the coronavirus, and urged them to double down on efforts to increase vaccination and testing as cases remain high in Europe.</p> <p>Dr. Carissa Etienne, director of the Pan American Health Organization, a regional arm of the W.H.O., said that while coronavirus cases had fallen in the Americas, they were increasing in some places, including the Caribbean and Canada, which has reported a 35 percent increase in cases over the last two weeks.</p> <p>“We know what has happened elsewhere foreshadows what our region will face,” Dr. Etienne said during a conference call with reporters. “Time and time again we’ve seen how the infection dynamics in Europe are mirrored here just a few weeks later.”</p> <p>In South America, a relatively large share of the population is fully vaccinated — 73 percent, according the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford. But Dr. Etienne said that 240 million people in the Americas have yet to receive a single vaccine dose, putting them at risk as tourism and travel increase in the region. “We know what it takes to protect our people,” she said. “We have to keep filling vaccination gaps.”</p> <p>Cuba, which has fully vaccinated 88 percent of its population, announced this week that starting Wednesday, travelers will no longer be required to present proof of vaccination or a negative coronavirus test result to enter the country.</p>

	<p>Some countries have made changes to their testing strategies that could make it harder to detect and respond to potential outbreaks, Dr. Etienne said.</p> <p>“Countries have to continue to monitor the virus to be prepared for what comes,” she said. “Many countries in recent weeks have scaled back public health measures prematurely.”</p> <p>Dr. Ciro Ugarte, director of health emergencies at P.A.H.O., said during the call that since Panama loosened its pandemic restrictions, it had not experienced a spike in cases, in part because it has an effective system for monitoring the virus.</p> <p>In response to a question about Mexico, where reported cases have decreased 40 percent in the last two weeks, another P.A.H.O. official, Dr. Sylvain Aldighieri, said the organization did not recommend that Mexico ease its restrictions. He said the authorities should remain particularly vigilant this month, when many people in Latin America are likely to travel around Holy Week and Easter.</p> <p>W.H.O. officials in other parts of the world have warned that relaxing pandemic rules too soon can lead to a surge in cases. Last month, while the highly transmissible Omicron subvariant BA.2 was sweeping through Europe, Dr. Hans Kluge, the organization’s director for the region, said that countries there were lifting restrictions “brutally, from too much to too few.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Fed signals aggressive steps fight inflation
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/6/fed-signals-more-aggressive-steps-to-fight-inflati/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve officials are signaling that they will take a more aggressive approach to fighting high inflation in the coming months - actions that will make borrowing sharply more expensive for consumers and businesses and heighten risks to the economy.</p> <p>In minutes from their policy meeting three weeks ago released Wednesday, Fed officials said that aggressive half-point rate hikes, rather than traditional quarter-point increases - “could be appropriate” multiple times this year. At last month’s meeting, many of the Fed policymakers favored a half-point increase, the minutes said, but held off because of the uncertainties created by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Instead, the Fed raised its key short-term rate by a quarter-point and signaled that it planned to continue raising rates well into next year.</p> <p>The minutes said the Fed is also moving closer to rapidly shrinking its huge \$9 trillion stockpile of bonds in the coming months, a move that would contribute to higher borrowing costs. The policymakers said they would likely cut their holdings by about \$95 billion a month - nearly double the pace they implemented five years ago when they last shrank their balance sheet.</p> <p>The plan to quickly draw down their bond holdings marks the latest move by Fed officials to accelerate their inflation-fighting efforts. Prices are rising at the fastest pace in four decades, and the officials in recent speeches have expressed increasing concern about getting inflation under control.</p> <p>Financial markets now expect much steeper hikes this year than Fed officials had signaled as recently as their meeting in mid-March.</p> <p>Higher rates from the Fed will heighten borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, credit cards and corporate loans. In doing so, the Fed hopes to cool economic growth and rising wages enough to rein in high inflation, which has caused hardships for millions of households and poses a severe political threat to President Joe Biden.</p> <p>Many economists have said they worry that the Fed has waited too long to begin raising rates and that the policymakers might end up responding so aggressively as to trigger a recession.</p>

Chair Jerome Powell opened the door two weeks ago to increasing rates by as much as a half-point at upcoming meetings, rather than by a traditional quarter-point. The Fed hasn't carried out any half-point rate increases since 2000. Lael Brainard, a key member of the Fed's Board of Governors, and other officials have also made clear that such sharp increases are possible. Most economists now expect the Fed to raise rates by a half-point at both its May and June meetings.

In a speech Tuesday, Brainard underscored the Fed's increasing aggressiveness by saying that the central bank's bond holdings will "shrink considerably more rapidly" over "a much shorter period" than the last time the Fed reduced its balance sheet, from 2017-2019. At that time, the balance sheet was about \$4.5 trillion. Now, it's twice as large.

The Fed bought trillions of dollars of Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities after the pandemic hammered the economy, with the goal of lowering longer-term borrowing rates. It also cut its short-term benchmark rate to near zero. Last month, it increased that rate to a range between 0.25% and 0.5%, its first increase in three years.

As a sign of how fast the Fed is reversing its policy, the last time the Fed purchased bonds, there was a three-year gap between when it stopped its purchases, in 2014, and when it began reducing the balance sheet, in 2017. Now that shift is likely to happen in as few as three months, economists say.

Brainard's remarks caused a sharp rise in the interest rate on the 10-year Treasury note, a key rate that influences mortgage rates, business loans and other borrowing costs. On Wednesday, that rate reached 2.6%, up from 2.3% just a week earlier, a sharp increase for that rate. A month ago, it was just 1.7%.

Shorter-term bond yields have jumped even higher, in some cases to above the 10-year yield, a pattern that has in the past been seen as a sign of an impending recession. Fed officials say, however, that shorter-term bond market yields aren't flashing the same warning signals.

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HEADLINE	04/07 Day 43 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/07/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-43-of-russias-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said the new package of western sanctions against Russia is “not enough” and without more painful measures and supply of weapons, Russia will view the actions as permission to launch a new bloody attack. In his daily address on Thursday, he called for the democratic world to reject Russian oil and completely block Russian banks from the international finance system, after the US, UK and EU unveiled new sanctions against Moscow.• US sanctions target Russian banks and elites, and include a ban on any American from investing in Russia as well as sanctions on Putin’s adult daughters. The UK is collaborating with the US on asset freezes against Russian banks and banning all new outward investment to Russia. The EU announced a wide-ranging package of sanctions, including import bans on coal and transaction bans on banks.• Nato’s foreign ministers will meet in Brussels on Thursday for two days of talks on bringing an end to the war.• Hungary’s right-wing, Putin-allied prime minister Viktor Orbán gave a press conference in which he said he had offered to broker talks with Russia. He offered to work towards a ceasefire, while stopping short of agreeing to extend EU sanctions against Russia’s oil and gas shipments.• Zelenskiy said Kremlin forces were trying to cover up evidence of atrocities. “We have information that the Russian military has changed its tactics and is trying to remove people who have been killed from streets and basements ... this is just an attempt to hide the evidence and nothing more,” he said Thursday, but did not provide evidence.• Russia’s military has now shifted its focus to the east of the Ukraine, with Ukraine authorities in Luhansk and Donetsk warning that civilians should leave as quickly as possible. It comes as western officials say Russia’s retreat from around Kyiv and the north east of

	<p>the country is now “largely complete” and that it will take “at least a week” before reconstituted units could go to Donbas and perhaps longer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia is hiding ‘thousands’ killed in Mariupol, Zelenskiy said. Russian forces are blocking humanitarian access to the besieged port city of Mariupol because it wants to hide evidence of “thousands” of people killed there, the president said. • More than 5,000 civilians, including 210 children, have been killed in Mariupol since the start of Russia’s invasion, the mayor of the besieged city said. Vadym Boichenko said 90% of the city’s infrastructure has been destroyed and Russian forces have targeted a hospital where 50 were burned to death. Russian attacks on the port city have obstructed access to food and supplies and Red Cross humanitarian convoy has been unsuccessful in getting in. • Ukrainian soldiers are being trained in the US to operate deadly Switchblade drones that Washington is supplying to Kyiv, the Pentagon said Wednesday. Defence department spokesman John Kirby said it was a “very small” number of Ukrainian troops who were already in the US before Russia invaded their country. • Britain is drawing up plans to send armoured vehicles to Ukraine, according to The Times. Options include sending a protected patrol vehicle, such as the Mastiff, or a vehicle like the Jackal, which can be used as a reconnaissance or long-range patrol vehicle, a ministry of defence report said.
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HEADLINE	04/06 Western arms turn tide for Ukraine?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/06/as-ukraine-war-enters-new-phase-can-western-arms-turn-the-tide
GIST	<p>As the war in Ukraine enters a new phase, Nato countries have been gradually stepping up their supply of weapons to Kyiv. In doing so, western nations are quietly crossing the defensive-only threshold set by leaders at the start of the crisis.</p> <p>But the question remains whether the gradual escalation in arms deliveries can avoid a Russian retaliation and turn the tide on the battlefield, where Moscow is seeking to wage a more conventional military-on-military war in the eastern Donbas.</p> <p>“The issue will be how much the west shifts to offensive weaponry,” said Phil Osborn, a former UK chief of defence intelligence, “and the absolute criticality of ensuring that the supply of critical military kit is maintained and increased.”</p> <p>Ukraine’s military spent the first six weeks of the war trying to pick off invading Russian armoured columns with light infantry using anti-tank bazookas. Poor Russian tactics and Ukrainian determination successfully forced the overstretched attackers to abandon their attacks on Kyiv, and Chernihiv and Sumy in the north-east.</p> <p>But Ukraine now has to deal with Russian forces in the east and south that have made more defensible gains and are better dug in.</p> <p>In the past 24 hours it has emerged that the Czech Republic has sent a dozen Soviet designed T-72 tanks, plus howitzer artillery pieces and BMP-1 armoured vehicles, a significant shift in the direction of supplying “offensive weapons” that western politicians had insisted they were not prepared to do.</p> <p>That by itself is not enough to make more than a dent in the 94 tanks that Ukraine is estimated by researchers at Oryx to have lost in the fighting so far – but there is persistent speculation Poland could spare 100 more, now it has reached a separate agreement on Tuesday to buy 250 US Abrams tanks for \$4.75bn.</p> <p>The UK is considering sending non-lethal armoured vehicles to Ukraine for patrol and reconnaissance work, according to a report in the Times.</p>

The next phase of the war – which could yet be decisive – is expected to unfold in the Donbas in the next month as Russian forces seek to capture Mariupol, create a land bridge to Crimea, expand the area of occupation in the self-proclaimed republics in Donetsk and Luhansk – and perhaps encircle Ukraine’s main fighting force ranged against it.

It is a struggle that will unfold over the course of April. Western intelligence officials believe the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, will want an “announceable success” for the country’s traditional Victory Day parade on 9 May, placing considerable emphasis on what the west is prepared to supply now.

A handful or two of Czech tanks, or the four Bushmaster armoured vehicles sent by Australia, will not make much difference. “If we had already got what we needed – all these planes, tanks, artillery, anti-missile and anti-ship weapons – we could have saved thousands of people,” Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said earlier this week.

The US announced it would send a further \$100m of Javelin anti-tank missiles on Wednesday, on top of \$300m of equipment on Friday, which includes two new sets of weapons, designed to help Ukrainian forces better attack the Russians.

Friday’s batch included “laser-guided rocket systems” thought by experts to refer to APKWS rockets. These are traditionally mounted on planes – and possibly drones – but can be used on the ground, and could in that instance help counter Russia’s preponderance in heavy artillery, which has caused so many Ukrainian casualties.

A second element of Friday’s package was 10 Switchblade 600 combat drones, which have a range of 90km and can fly for 40 minutes, and carry the same anti-tank warhead as the Javelin anti-tank weapon – a replacement for lost Turkish TB2 drones, giving Ukraine more options on the battlefield.

Nick Reynolds, a land warfare expert at Rusi, said he believed the Switchblade drones were “an urgent requirement” because they could help “strike Russian command nodes, electronic warfare vehicles, logistics hubs, artillery and air defence systems in depth” – reaching deep behind the frontline in Donbas.

The growing supply will certainly help Ukraine fight the second phase of the Russian attack, but it is probably not until the end of April that a clearer picture will emerge of the revised military balance. Without more tanks, in particular, it is not obvious that Ukraine can relieve the besieged Mariupol.

Meanwhile, the west’s aims are becoming less clear. Is the goal to allow Ukraine to force the Kremlin into peace talks – or try to inflict a more heavy defeat that would risk provoking an unpredictable Russian president?

A western official cautioned on Wednesday that it would be “fundamentally different” to try to force Russian forces out of the separatist republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and Crimea because of “the way in which Russia would defend those interests”.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Australia meeting w/Myanmar coup leader
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/07/australia-stays-silent-on-outcome-of-meeting-with-myanmar-coup-leader
GIST	<p>Australia’s ambassador to Myanmar met alleged war criminal and coup leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on Wednesday, in a meeting the junta claims discussed “enhancement of cooperation” between the two countries.</p> <p>Pictures published by the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper show Australia’s ambassador, Andrea Faulkner, and military attache, meeting with the coup leader in the Myanmar capital Naypyidaw.</p>

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing led the Myanmar military's pogrom against the ethnic minority Rohingya in 2017, which killed more than 25,000 people and forced more than 700,000 to flee the country, and he engineered a military coup in February 2021, later declaring himself prime minister.

Min Aung Hlaing has been recommended by the UN for investigation and prosecution for war crimes and genocide, and personally sanctioned by the US, EU, UK and Canada, but not by Australia.

Advocates for Myanmar's elected government argued the meeting between the coup leader and the representative of a western democracy, would be used as a propaganda tool by the junta to legitimise its unlawful control of Myanmar. Justice for Myanmar's Yadanar Maung described Australia's decision to take the meeting as "an act of betrayal" of the Myanmar people.

The meeting has been prominently reported by Myanmar's state-controlled media, in Burmese, and in English for international audiences. Several pictures of the meeting have been published, including one of the Senior General presenting the ambassador with a painting as a gift.

The regime reported that Wednesday's meeting, in the parlour of Min Aung Hlaing's office, discussed "the further maintenance of good relations between two countries, enhancement of cooperation in various sectors between governments and peoples of both countries".

It described the CRPH, the elected exiled Myanmar parliament, and the NUG, the exiled National Unity Government, as "terrorists".

Before Senate estimates on Thursday, Katrina Cooper, the deputy secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, was questioned by Greens senator Janet Rice over the junta's reports that the meeting discussed "cooperation in various sectors" and "maintenance of good relations".

Cooper would not comment on the junta's characterisation of the meeting, but said there were no areas of cooperation with the junta and that the ambassador "asked for a number of things".

"She reiterated Australia's concern about the situation in Myanmar, she urged the Myanmar military to cease violence, release arbitrary detainees, engage in dialogue and ensure unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance."

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HEADLINE	04/07 Exiled Yemen president steps aside
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/07/exiled-yemen-president-steps-aside-amid-hopes-over-truce-abd-rabbu-mansour-hadi
GIST	<p>Yemen's exiled president has stepped aside and transferred his powers to a presidential council as international and regional efforts to end the country's long-running civil war gained momentum with a two-month truce.</p> <p>Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, major players in the conflict, appear to have played a role in Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi's decision, quickly welcoming it with a pledge of \$3bn (£2.3bn) in aid. The head of the new council has close ties to Riyadh.</p> <p>Whether the switch will expedite an end to the grinding war remains to be seen, as UN-sponsored negotiations have been at an impasse and fighting, airstrikes and missile attacks continued until late last month. The Houthis did not immediately comment on Hadi's announcement.</p> <p>Hadi said the newly established council will run the internationally recognised government and lead negotiations with the Iranian-backed Houthis, according to a statement aired on state-run media.</p>

The move is meant to unify the anti-Houthi camp after years of infighting and disputes, and was almost certainly orchestrated in Riyadh, where Yemeni factions were meeting over the past week to discuss efforts to end the war.

“With this declaration a presidential pleadership council shall be established to complete the implementation of the tasks of the transitional period. I irreversibly delegate to the presidential leadership council my full powers,” Hadi declared on Yemen’s state-run TV.

Hadi also sacked vice-resident Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, a powerful military figure, and also delegated Ahmar’s powers to the presidential council.

The presidential council is chaired by Rashad al-Alimi, an adviser to Hadi and former interior minister with the government of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Alimi enjoys close ties with Saudi Arabia and other political groups inside Yemen, including the powerful Islah party – the transnational Muslim Brotherhood’s branch in Yemen.

The council has seven members, including Aidarus al-Zoubaidi, head of the secessionist Southern Transitional Council – an umbrella group of heavily armed and well-financed militias propped up by the UAE since 2015.

Sheikh Sultan al-Aradah, the powerful governor of energy-rich Marib province, was also named a member of the council. So was Tariq Saleh, a militia leader and nephew of the late president who has close ties with the UAE.

Hadi was named president of Yemen in 2012 with a mission to oversee a democratic transition following its Arab Spring uprising that ended Saleh’s longtime rule.

However, the Houthis, a religious movement turned rebel militia, allied with Saleh and seized the capital Sanaa in 2014, forcing Hadi and his government into exile in Saudi Arabia.

Months later, Saudi Arabia formed a military coalition and entered the war to try to restore Hadi’s government to power.

The conflict has in recent years become a regional proxy war that has killed more than 150,000 people, including over 14,500 civilians. It has also created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.

Welcoming Hadi’s move, Saudi Arabia urged the presidential council to embark on UN-led negotiations with the Houthis to find a “political, final and comprehensive” settlement to the conflict, according to the state-run Saudi Press Agency.

The powerful Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, has also met with the council head and its members, according to Saudi state-run TV.

The warring sides announced a two-month ceasefire earlier this month, the first nationwide truce in Yemen in six years.

Hadi’s announcement came as Yemeni talks called by the Saudi-based Gulf Cooperation Council entered their final day on Thursday. The Houthis boycotted the GCC-facilitated efforts because they’re taking place in Saudi Arabia, their adversary’s territory.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Shanghai’s ‘grim’ Covid outbreak
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/06/shanghais-grim-covid-outbreak-threatens-more-global-supply-chain-disruption

The Covid-19 outbreak in Shanghai remains “extremely grim” with the ongoing lockdown of China’s financial powerhouse threatening to devastate the country’s economy and “tear apart” already very stretched global supply chains.

As Shanghai announced another daily record high of 16,766 cases on Wednesday, the director of the city’s working group on epidemic control was quoted by state media as saying that the outbreak in the city was “still running at a high level”.

“The situation is extremely grim,” Gu Honghui said.

Although low by international standards, this is China’s worst outbreak since the virus took hold in Wuhan in January 2020 sparking the global pandemic.

Shanghai’s entire population of 26 million is now locked down and there is growing discontent among people who have been living with restrictions on their movements for weeks as the authorities stick doggedly to their zero-Covid policy of eliminating the disease.

At least 38,000 medical personnel have been deployed to Shanghai from other parts of China, along with 2,000 military personnel, and the city is mass-testing residents.

A separate outbreak continues to rage in the north-eastern province of Jilin and the capital, Beijing, also saw an additional nine cases. Workers shut down an entire shopping centre in the city where a case had been detected.

There are increasing signs that China’s economy is slowing sharply because of the lockdowns. Activity in China’s services sector contracted at the steepest pace in two years in March as the surge in cases restricted mobility and weighed on demand. The closely watched Caixin purchasing managers’ index (PMI) dived to 42.0 in March from 50.2 in February. A drop below the 50-point mark separates growth from contraction.

The same survey showed a contraction in the country’s giant manufacturing sector last week and economists warned on Wednesday that there could be worse to come as the Shanghai lockdown begins to affect the figures for the coming months.

Stock markets in Asia were a sea of red on Wednesday with the Nikkei down 1.5% and the Hang Seng off more than 2%. European markets were also down in early trade.

Alex Holmes of Capital Economics said spill overs to the rest of Asia from the Covid outbreak in China have been relatively minor so far but “the possibility of major disruption to supply chains remains a large and growing risk”.

“The longer the current wave lasts, the greater the chance,” he said.

“An added risk factor is that after many months of disruption along their entire length, global supply chains are already very stretched. There is now a much greater potential for a small bottleneck to have large repercussions.”

Two years of disruption from the pandemic has dislocated the global economy’s complex supply chains, causing a sharp rise in the prices of commodities, food and consumer goods.

The war in Ukraine has added to inflation, especially in oil and grain prices, and further shutdowns in China could worsen the situation.

Christian Roeloffs, co-founder and chief executive of Hamburg-based logistics company Container xChange, said market volatility has caused uncertainties which has caused massive delays and reduced capacities.

“Covid-induced lockdowns in China and the Russia-Ukraine war has torn apart the expectations of recovery of the supply chain, which has been grappling to keep up to the pressures of implications resulting from these and many more disruptions.”

Roeloffs said the dislocations set off by coronavirus and geopolitical tensions meant that companies were looking at ways to ease their reliance on the key US-China trade artery and seek to diversify their supply lines.

“We will need more resilient supply chains and that means less concentration on high volume routes,” he said. “While China-US will still be significantly massive, more smaller trade networks will increase to other countries in south-east Asia... This will be a very gradual process. It doesn’t mean that freight demand from China will decrease now, but I think it might not grow as much anymore.”

His comments echo a warning on Tuesday from a central bank chief that the world economy may be on the brink of a new inflationary era where consumers will be faced with persistently higher prices and rising interest rates due to the retreat of globalisation.

Agustín Carstens, head of the Bank for International Settlements, said higher rates could be required for several years to combat inflation. Prices are running hot throughout the world with developed economies seeing the highest inflation rates for decades. In the UK, inflation is 6.2%, while in the US prices have increased by 7.9% in the year through February – the highest rate in in 40 years.

Speaking in Geneva, Carstens said building new supply chains that decreased the west’s dependency on China would be expensive and result in higher production being passed on to consumers in the form of prices and therefore higher interest rates to curb inflation.

“What starts as temporary can become entrenched, as behaviour adapts if what starts that way goes far enough and lasts long enough. It’s hard to establish where that threshold lies, and we may find out only after it has been crossed,” he said.

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HEADLINE	04/06 UK asset freeze Russia’s largest bank
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/06/liz-truss-announces-uk-asset-freeze-against-russias-biggest-bank
GIST	<p>The UK will impose an asset freeze on Russia’s largest bank, place sanctions on eight more oligarchs and end imports of oil and coal by next year, the foreign secretary has said.</p> <p>Amid growing horror over alleged war crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine, Liz Truss announced that oligarchs including Andrey Guryev, a Russian fertiliser billionaire linked to Witanhurst, the UK’s second-largest private residence after Buckingham Palace, would be subject to sanctions.</p> <p>Another is Moshe Kantor, the largest shareholder of the fertiliser company Acron. He has been a key figure in Britain’s Jewish community, hosting Holocaust memorial events attended by Prince Charles and the French president, Emmanuel Macron.</p> <p>Others who have been placed under sanctions include Sergey Sergeyevich Ivanov, the president of the world’s largest diamond producer, Alrosa, and Leonid Mikhelson, the founder and chief executive of the leading Russian natural gas producer Novatek, with a net worth of £18bn.</p> <p>Mikhelson, an avid art collector, founded a not-for-profit Russian contemporary art foundation, V-A-C, in 2009, which has since funded international collaborations.</p> <p>Guryev was revealed in 2015 to be the beneficiary of an offshore company that owned the 25-bedroom Witanhurst mansion in Highgate, north London. He was targeted by EU sanctions a month ago.</p>

Truss said sanctions were being stepped up after the massacre of civilians in Bucha by Russian soldiers. “Today, we are stepping up our campaign to bring Putin’s appalling war to an end with some of our toughest sanctions yet,” she said.

“Our latest wave of measures will bring an end to the UK’s imports of Russian energy and sanction yet more individuals and businesses, decimating Putin’s war machine. Together with our allies, we are showing the Russian elite that they cannot wash their hands of the atrocities committed on Putin’s orders. We will not rest until Ukraine prevails.”

Earlier Boris Johnson said Russian atrocities in the previously occupied towns around Kyiv did not “look far short of genocide to me”, in his strongest words to date about the mass killings. The UK has previously been reticent to use the term genocide in the absence of a court ruling.

The UK announcement came alongside similar measures from western allies including the EU, which has also banned imports of Russian coal. The US announced it was also imposing sanctions against Sberbank, Russian’s largest bank, along with the UK. Washington said it would target two of Putin’s adult daughters, Maria Vorontsova and Katerina Tikhonova, with sanctions.

The UK will impose asset freezes on Sberbank and Credit Bank of Moscow and put in place an outright ban on all new outward investment in Russia, which was worth £11bn in 2020.

By the end of 2022, the UK would end all dependency on Russian coal and oil, the sanctions announcement said, with a pledge to end imports of gas “as soon as possible thereafter”. Export bans will also be put in place on key oil refining equipment, as well as a ban on imports of iron and steel products.

Nato foreign ministers will meet at a working dinner on Wednesday night and a formal meeting on Thursday morning, and Truss will meet G7 foreign ministers later on Thursday.

The Foreign Office said there should be an accelerated timetable agreed for all G7 countries to end their dependency on Russian energy, designed to put pressure on European countries.

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HEADLINE	04/07 Ukraine: new Russia sanctions not enough
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/07/ukraine-says-russia-will-see-new-sanctions-as-permission-to-attack-amid-warnings-of-fresh-offensive
GIST	<p>Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has said new sanctions by the west against Russia do not go far enough and will be seen by invading forces as a “permission to attack”, as fears of an assault on the east of the country intensify.</p> <p>It comes after the US, UK and EU unveiled a raft of new sanctions targeting Russian banks and the country’s elites. The US measures include a ban on investing in Russia as well as sanctions on president Vladimir Putin’s adult daughters. The EU sanctions include a ban on coal imports and restrictions on banks.</p> <p>“This package has a spectacular look. But this is not enough,” Zelenskiy said in his nightly address.</p> <p>“If there is no really painful package of sanctions against Russia and if there is no supply of weapons ... it will be considered by Russia as a permission. A permission to attack,” he said, calling for the west to reject Russian oil and completely block the country’s banks from the international finance system.</p> <p>Zelenskiy also said, without providing evidence, that Russian troops were now trying to cover up atrocities in Ukraine. Grisly images of dead civilians in the streets of Bucha this week sparked international condemnation and calls for Russian forces to be tried for war crimes.</p>

	<p>The UN general assembly will vote on Thursday on whether to suspend Russia from the UN premier human rights body in the wake of the discoveries. Russia has denied responsibility and suggested the images were fake or the deaths occurred after its troops pulled out. However, satellite images show that bodies were lying on streets in Bucha for days before Russian troops left the town.</p> <p>“Russia’s participation on the Human Rights Council is a farce,” US ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said this week.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Seattle ‘Vision Zero’ use more focus?
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3422637/could-seattles-vision-zero-use-more-focus/
GIST	<p>Seattle is one of the most walkable cities in the country with a walking score of 99 out of 100 — that’s definitely worth a pat on the ‘ol back! But with all the new infrastructure and SDOT’s implementation of Vision Zero, the city has seen pedestrian injuries and fatalities increase exponentially.</p> <p>Back in 2015, Seattle introduced Vision Zero, centered around the idea that no pedestrian/cyclist should have to die or suffer injury in a traffic accident. Its goal is to end all pedestrian fatalities by the year 2030. But SDOT’s own data shows that pedestrian fatalities have gone up 150%, and as we approach spring 2022, those numbers are continuing to rise.</p> <p>That said, SDOT has made improvements all over the city, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leading Pedestrian Intervals at intersections were installed so walkers can have a head start and are visible to drivers. 2. Speeds have been reduced to 25 miles per hour throughout the city. 3. Road diets have eliminated lanes to make the streets smaller. <p>But with the increase in fatalities it begs the question, did Vision Zero lose its focus?</p> <p>We asked SDOT to comment on the increase in fatalities and they replied with the following statement:</p> <p><i>Unfortunately, traffic fatalities (especially involving pedestrians) have been climbing across the country and Seattle hasn’t been immune to that trend. With Vision Zero, however, we’ve seen positive changes where we apply proven engineering treatments. For instance, redesigning high injury streets like Rainier Ave S to slow vehicle speeds and reduce crashes; lowering speed limits across the city; making more intersections pedestrian-first; and expanding our network of connected and protected places to walk, roll, and bike.</i></p> <p><i>There is more to do and our work will continue to be guided by a few key principles: crashes are preventable, death and injury on our streets is not acceptable, and humans make mistakes. We’re working to design streets in a way that accounts for human imperfection and frailty, prioritizing the safety of people over the speed of vehicles. It will take time, but collectively, we aim to advance a culture of care where everyone can get around safely and with dignity.</i></p> <p>The good news about Vision Zero is that it has time on its side. The initiative has eight years to prove its self successful. Until Phase 3 to rolls out, pedestrians and cyclists will have to remain vigilant about safety and hope that drivers do the same.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Russians pour money into Turkey
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/superyachts-seaside-apartments-and-suitcases-full-of-cash-russians-pour-money-into-turkey-11649323803?mod=hp_lead_pos9
GIST	<p>ISTANBUL—Turkey is fast becoming a haven for Russian money, from oligarchs parking their superyachts on the country’s shores to young dissidents and tech workers flying from Moscow with cash in suitcases.</p>

The influx of Russian money highlights how Turkey has opposed the invasion of Ukraine while acting as an intermediary between the two countries. The strategic U.S. ally and NATO member state has condemned the invasion and [sold weapons to Ukraine](#) while choosing not to impose sanctions on Russia, a decision that also shields Turkey's economy from the worst of the fallout from the war. Turkish leaders have also acted as mediators in the crisis.

Since [Moscow launched its invasion of Ukraine](#) in February, thousands of Russians have flown to Turkey, one of a shrinking number of countries where they can still fly directly, with many choosing to stay. Some of these Russians are relocating to cosmopolitan Istanbul or coastal resort cities like Antalya, a popular tourist destination for Russians before the war that is becoming a permanent home for some.

The Russians are using a variety of means to overcome Western sanctions that cut off some Russian banks from [the Swift payment system](#) and capital controls imposed by Moscow that limit the amount of foreign currency Russians can send abroad. Among the most common are Russian cash-transfer companies that operate in Turkey, cryptocurrencies and simply carrying thousands of dollars in cash through airports, according to Russians and Turks interviewed for this article.

The Turkish government has said it won't stop Russian funds flowing in, even from oligarchs, as long as the money is legal. Turkey badly needs foreign currency after [an economic crisis last year](#) that caused its currency, the lira, to lose about 45% of its value against the dollar in less than three months. The U.S., U.K., and European Union have [imposed sanctions on Russian oligarchs](#) with alleged ties to President [Vladimir Putin](#) over the war in Ukraine.

"If you mean that these oligarchs can do any business in Turkey, then of course. If it is legal, and it is not against international law, I will consider it. If it is against international law, then that's another story," said Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, speaking to an international conference in Doha, Qatar, on March 26.

The U.S. government has been silent on Russians moving their money, with Washington praising Ankara's role in [hosting Russian-Ukrainian peace talks](#).

Inflows of Russian money may already be helping Turkey's finances at the margins.

Turkey's central bank took in about \$3 billion in just two days in mid-March resulting from swaps with domestic banks, according to publicly available data. That money was likely largely composed of deposits from Russians, said Omer Gencal, an economist and former executive at HSBC Turkey and other major Turkish banks.

"This money poured into Turkish banks, and they transferred it to the central bank via swap deals," said Mr. Gencal. "They see Turkey as a safe haven," he said of the Russians.

Moscow's invasion of Ukraine has driven an increase in Russians buying property in Turkey, including some who have invested more than \$250,000 each to acquire a Turkish passport under the country's citizenship-through-investment program, real-estate brokers said.

Gül Gül, the chief executive of Istanbul real-estate company Golden Sign, said that in the past month Russians have begun to outnumber her previous base of clients, who mostly came from Arab countries. The newly arrived Russians are buying as many as four apartments at a time, usually with cash, in order to invest the \$250,000 required for citizenship.

"Currently, out of 10 flats we sell, six or seven are bought by Russians," said Ms. Gül. "They are mostly businesspeople, wealthy ones, some of them oligarchs."

Among the oligarchs who have parked their assets in Turkey is Roman Abramovich, who has moved two of his superyachts to Turkish ports in recent weeks, though one has since left. Mr. Abramovich has unexpectedly emerged as a player in Russian-Ukrainian peace negotiations brokered by Turkey. After

weeks of operating a back channel to Mr. Putin, Mr. Abramovich showed up at formal negotiations between Russia and Ukraine in Istanbul on March 29. Mr. Abramovich didn't respond to a request for comment.

Another yacht owned by former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, a 74-meter-long vessel called Universe, docked in Istanbul last week, according to publicly available ship-tracking data.

At the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, the Turkish government scrutinized Russian money flowing in.

Turkish lenders, particularly private banks, have also been wary of running afoul of Western sanctions, according to bankers and analysts. The banks strictly applied government rules—for example, a requirement to obtain a residence permit before opening a bank account, according to people familiar with the rules.

Those initial restrictions soon gave way to a more permissive approach to Russian money. At a single branch of one state-owned bank in Istanbul, Russians have opened more than 600 accounts in recent weeks, according to a person with knowledge of the accounts.

Many of those fleeing Russia are young people including artists, tech workers, academics and others who opposed the invasion of Ukraine or fear they could be drafted into the military. Many left carrying hundreds or thousands of dollars in cash because of capital controls that the Russian government imposed.

"I don't want my money to be used to kill Ukrainians," said Ruslan Vovchenko, a 25-year-old graphic designer who traveled to Istanbul from Moscow in March after protesting the war. "If I can't change the system, I'll remove myself from the system."

The exodus of young Russians has meant that a range of Russian and foreign companies have had to adjust to the fact that a significant portion of their workforce has fled.

Search-engine company Yandex, classified-ad site Avito, commercial bank Tinkoff and software firm DataArt collectively had more than 1,000 workers fly to Turkey, according to people familiar with the matter. About 900 Yandex workers flew to Turkey shortly after the beginning of the war, though around 300 of them have since left, said a person familiar with the matter.

Yandex said it "offers an opportunity to work remotely, and some employees work from different locations, including Turkey. We do not regulate their whereabouts." DataArt said it is exiting Russia and expects several hundred employees to leave the country by this summer, but didn't comment on the number going to Turkey.

Western sanctions and Visa Inc. and Mastercard Inc.'s decisions to shut down operations in Russia have prompted Russians to get creative about how to move their money. One option is the Russian Mir payment system, which works at certain locations in Turkey. "We accept Mir" signs have begun cropping up in grocery stores around Istanbul.

Middle-class Russians have mostly brought a few thousand dollars at a time, either in cash or by using Russian wire-transfer companies that continue to operate in Turkey. One popular service is KoronaPay, which allows people to wire money out of Russia and withdraw money in Turkey and a range of other countries. The company allows transfers worth more than 15,000 euros, equivalent to \$16,400, as long as customers verify their source of income, according to the company's website.

"They're paid in rubles so they bring rubles," said Volkan Celikyurek, a money changer in Istanbul's Laleli neighborhood, which is frequented by Russian traders and one of the only areas where exchange offices buy and sell rubles.

"I bought at most 100,000 rubles at a time. But there are those who bought millions," he said.

HEADLINE	04/07 Ukraine ragtag arsenal thwarts Russia in air
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-anti-air-russia-attacks-11649180661?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	<p>Russia began its war with Ukraine wielding far superior air power. But with Soviet-era anti-air systems and imported shoulder-launched missiles, Ukrainian forces repelled Russia's air attack enough to keep the skies contested and thwart Russia's all-important air cover for its ground forces.</p> <p>As the war continues in its second month, Ukraine's ability to slow Russia's air attacks have allowed its forces to antagonize Russia's front lines, intercept its convoys and protect many of its cities, ultimately leading Moscow to draw its troops back from the north and shift its focus to eastern Ukraine.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Russia invaded Ukraine with an arsenal of advanced fighter planes, attack helicopters and guided missile launchers, bombarding cities and inflicting widespread casualties. Russia had nearly 1,800 military helicopters and aircraft combined before the war began, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Ukraine had 163.• With the aid of imported weapons, Ukrainian forces struck back with an air offensive aimed at limiting Russia's effectiveness, using weapons from Soviet-era anti-air systems and shoulder-launched missiles, becoming a surprise trump card against the military giant. Ukraine also has been able to use its own aircraft to hit back at Russia, in particular with drones.• The bulk of Russia's aircraft losses are from surface-to-air missiles, according to Scowcroft Center's Forward Defense practice, a nonpartisan organization that analyzes defense strategies.• The S-300 long-range system is a critical weapon in Ukraine's surface-to-air defenses. Ukraine has used its long-range and mobile capabilities to defend against threats at high altitude where other weapons can't reach.• Ukraine had about 250 of the Soviet-made systems before the war began, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a London think tank, and the U.S. agreed to send more last month. Despite the technology's vintage, the once top-of-the-line equipment remains effective, striking airborne targets at ranges from 16 miles to 93 miles, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies.• Once Ukraine's long-range anti-air batteries drove Russian pilots to fly lower to escape those systems, that put them within range of short-range systems in what became a shooting gallery for Ukrainian air defenses early on in some battles, according to military analysts.• The SA-8 is a decades-old, short-range, tactical air-defense system that has a shorter range than the S-300, but is highly mobile and easy to hide. Like the S-300, it is another Soviet-made system the U.S. is sending Ukraine. It has an engagement range from about one to nine miles and can reach targets up to three miles in the air, according to GlobalSecurity.org, a weapons analysis website. It is designed to move with ground forces and provide cover from aircraft and helicopters.• Man-portable air-defense systems, or MANPADS, are shoulder-fired missiles, which also are effective against low-flying aircraft and helicopters.• Ukraine has Strelas, which are Soviet MANPADS, and also Stingers, that the U.S. and some other North Atlantic Treaty Organization nations are providing to Ukraine. They are considered to be highly accurate. Their heat-seeking missiles lock onto the infrared signature of a moving target. Their range is classified.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine's TB2 drones have managed to evade Russia's defenses and attack Russian convoys. Russian air-defense systems can't see the drones, said a person from the company making the TB2. The Russians say, however, that Russian forces have successfully downed Ukrainian drones. Ukraine initially received the Turkish-made drones in 2019 and has been using their high-powered cameras to view the battlefield and laser-correct artillery strikes. The TB2 can stay aloft for 24 hours, with an altitude ceiling of roughly 25,000 feet. <p>Russia hasn't successfully eliminated Ukraine's surface-to-air missiles, nor has it pressed for the complete destruction of Ukrainian fighter aircraft. Taken together, these factors have prevented Russia from establishing air superiority and fully supporting a ground invasion force, according to Scowcroft Center's Forward Defense practice.</p> <p>As Ukraine prepares for a new phase in the invasion—one where Russia may double down on bombarding cities and inflicting casualties—Ukraine's air offensive may become critical to its defense.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Ukraine surprise strike on Russia fleet
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-surprise-strike-on-russian-fleet-hobbles-putins-donbas-strategy-11649250001?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2
GIST	<p>A surprise Ukrainian strike on a Russian ship at a southern port city last month could curb Moscow's plan to expand its hold on the Donbas region, eliminating a key military advantage in the Russian attack plan, Ukrainian military analysts and U.S. officials said.</p> <p>The March 24 offensive against Russian navy ships docked at a captured port in Berdyansk on the Azov Sea was the first major strike on the Russian fleet, Ukrainian and U.S. officials said. The attack destroyed a ship laden with supplies, drove others back into the sea, and damaged the port facilities.</p> <p>The strike ended the presumption that Russian ships could attack without the threat of a Ukrainian reply. And it has limited Russia's ability to fire missiles and artillery as it pivots its assault toward Donbas in Ukraine's east, said retired Adm. James Foggo, who commanded U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa.</p> <p>Hours after the strike, Russia moved its ships in port out to sea, making it harder for them to attack Ukraine's cities and preventing them from supporting ground forces.</p> <p>"It's a major logistical blow," Adm. Foggo said. "It's an 'aha!' moment for the Russians. Despite the damage they have done inside Ukraine, Ukrainian forces are still capable of conducting offensive strikes with precision."</p> <p>In the nearly two weeks since the strike, Russia's navy hasn't launched any major attacks on Ukrainian cities, although it has struck targets around a few of them. On Sunday, missiles from Russian ships struck the Ukrainian port city of Odessa, hitting infrastructure.</p> <p>Russia's military made port cities a priority during its assault into Ukraine. It seized the city of Berdyansk, a key foothold for its future attacks in strategically important cities such as Mariupol, just days into its invasion of Ukraine, soon boasting of the advantage the port would afford its war effort.</p> <p>Quickly putting the port to use, Russia landed huge ships carrying as much as 2,000 tons of supplies each for its ground forces in the Ukrainian south. The Russians ejected Ukrainian cargo ships, dredgers and a tug, then berthed their own ships carrying multiple-launch rocket systems to provide cover for troops moving into the region.</p> <p>The ships at Berdyansk were only lightly defended, as the nearest Ukrainian forces were about 60 miles away.</p>

“The Russians thought Ukraine didn’t have any capability to reach them,” said Andrii Ryzhenko, a former Ukrainian navy captain now with the Center for Defense Strategies, a Kyiv think tank with close ties to the military. “But Ukraine had the capability.”

By the early weeks of the war, Russia had as many as 22 ships in the Black Sea and another dozen in the Azov Sea, U.S. officials said. At least half of those in the Azov Sea were docked at Berdyansk—“sitting ducks,” said Bryan Clark, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington.

“It’s just an example of how cavalier Russia’s operations have been about keeping ships at shore,” Mr. Clark said.

Russia had major advantages over the Ukrainian navy for nearly a decade. It captured and destroyed much of the Ukrainian navy at the port of Sevastopol during Moscow’s 2014 seizure of Crimea, expanding its influence over the Black Sea. And in the run-up to [the Feb. 24 invasion](#), Russia moved much of its navy from as far as the Baltic Sea toward Ukraine’s shores.

The Azov Sea, a small, shallow body of water bounded by Russia, Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula, has been strategically important for centuries. Ships operating off the Azov Sea coast took part in the Russian assault on the southern city of Mariupol, military analysts said, [firing artillery into Mariupol](#) with little risk from Ukraine’s defenses. The ships also held supplies for nearby ground forces and provided another line of defense to [troops and tanks entering Mariupol](#).

The Azov Sea is also the fastest supply route between Russia and Crimea, because Ukrainian forces destroyed the rail lines between the two in 2014. From the Russian port of Temryuk, it is faster for Moscow to deliver troops and supplies by sea to Berdyansk than to drive them over the bridge that spans the Kerch Strait, then north through Crimea and eastward over a strip of captured Ukrainian coastline.

On March 24, Ukraine fired a Tochka-U ballistic missile at the port, Mr. Ryzhenko said. The missile struck the Saratov, a Cold War-era landing vessel designed to ferry troops and equipment ashore through a ramp at the bow. As the Saratov foundered, other ships fled the Berdyansk port under a plume of smoke. The attack also damaged the port, according to satellite images.

U.S. defense officials warned that Russia could be making adjustments in the sea, much as it is doing around the Ukrainian capital. Russia said it was repositioning its forces around Kyiv, which U.S. officials described as a regrouping based on battlefield losses and logistical challenges.

Since the strike, Russia had withdrawn all but three ships from the Azov Sea as of last week, a U.S. senior defense official said, hindering Moscow’s ability to supply troops in the Ukrainian south.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin late last month said it was shifting its mission to Ukraine’s east, aiming to consolidate control over Donbas, its initial [plan to quickly take Kyiv](#) under relentless Ukrainian resistance.

The Berdyansk strike could also have a wide-reaching impact on the ability of Russia’s navy to support its army.

With the damaged Berdyansk port off limits to ships for weeks, Russia’s capacity to land troops there and in the vicinity of Odessa has diminished, especially as nearby [Mykolaiv remains in Ukrainian control](#), analysts said.

“After the attack on landing ships in Berdyansk, the Russian Federation will be forced to take several, possibly two or three, landing ships from the Black Sea to the Azov Sea,” said Andrii Klymenko, a defense and maritime analyst with the Black Sea Institute of Strategic Studies, a Ukrainian think tank.

“This will weaken landing capabilities.”

HEADLINE	04/06 Pedestrians killed by drivers rose 17%
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/pedestrians-killed-by-drivers-rose-17-in-first-half-of-2021-11649294440?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>The number of U.S. pedestrians killed in motor-vehicle crashes surged 17% in the first half of 2021, according to a nonprofit safety group, which linked the increase to reckless drivers, outdated infrastructure and fewer officers patrolling the roads.</p> <p>In the first six months of 2021, drivers struck and killed 3,441 people, up from 2,934 in the same period in 2020, according to a report released Thursday from the Governors Highway Safety Association, which represents state highway-safety offices that supplied the preliminary data.</p> <p>“The overall number, by far, is very shocking. That is a huge number,” said Jonathan Adkins, the association’s executive director. All these families “have lost someone all because someone was literally taking a walk.”</p> <p>The increase is part of a rising trend in fatalities in recent years. Even in 2020, pedestrian deaths remained elevated despite a sharp decline in driving at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Overall, there were 6,516 pedestrian deaths in 2020, up from 4,457 in 2011, the highway-safety association said.</p> <p>In addition to rising pedestrian fatalities, car-crash deaths have also surged since the Covid-19 pandemic began.</p> <p>The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration projects that about 31,720 people died in car crashes between January and September last year. That would be the highest number of fatalities reported in the first nine months of any year since 2006. The numbers show the fastest increase in car fatalities in nearly half a century.</p> <p>“We have to change a culture that accepts as inevitable the loss of tens of thousands of people in traffic crashes,” Steven Cliff, deputy administrator for NHTSA, said earlier this year.</p> <p>Mr. Adkins said part of the problem is that fewer police officers are patrolling the roads. When there are fewer law-enforcement officials on the streets, the rate of people driving dangerously increases, he said. Better infrastructure including newer roads and highways would also prevent more pedestrian deaths, Mr. Adkins added.</p> <p>He is hopeful for a safer future. President Biden signed into law last year a roughly \$1 trillion infrastructure plan that includes repairing aging roads and bridges.</p> <p>In addition, the U.S. Department of Transportation detailed earlier this year its National Roadway Safety Strategy. Mr. Adkins said he hoped the funding and strategy plans would help create safer roads and reduce dangerous behaviors among drivers, such as speeding and drunken driving.</p> <p>“We know what to do, and now we have some of the resources we need to do it,” Mr. Adkins said. “So I’m really hopeful that things will start to turn around.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Germany intercepts Russia radio on killings
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/07/bucha-german-intelligence-radio-bnd-russia/
GIST	BERLIN — Germany’s foreign intelligence service claims to have intercepted radio communications in which Russian soldiers discuss carrying out indiscriminate killings in Ukraine.

In two separate communications, Russian soldiers described how they question soldiers as well as civilians, and then proceed to shoot them, according to an intelligence official familiar with the findings who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the matter's sensitivity.

The findings, first [reported](#) by the German magazine Der Spiegel and confirmed by three people briefed on the information, further undermine claims by Russia that atrocities — including in Bucha — are being carried out only after its soldiers leave occupied areas.

Scenes from Bucha, a suburb near the Ukrainian capital, have become a symbol of the war's atrocities and galvanized calls for [probes](#) into possible war crimes. One person said the radio messages are likely to provide greater insight into suspected atrocities in other towns north of Kyiv that had been held by Russian soldiers. The foreign intelligence agency, known as the BND, may be able to match signal intelligence with videos and satellite images to make connections to specific killings, two people said.

These people also said the radio traffic suggests that members of the Wagner Group, the private military unit with close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin and his allies, played a role in the attacks on civilians while Russian forces were in control of the town. Another person briefed on the intelligence said the involvement could have been by the Wagner Group or another private contractor.

Germany intelligence officials on Wednesday briefed members of at least two parliamentary committees on the findings, according to people familiar with the process.

"The reported cruelties have affected the members of the respective committees where it was reported very strongly," said one of the people briefed on the intelligence.

Another person said the agency had high confidence in the findings, though it was not specific about how it obtained the radio communication. The third person said the information contributes to understanding of attitudes inside the Russian military but hardly represents "final evidence of who shot whom at what time." This person said the examples discussed by the BND point to an atmosphere of panic leading soldiers to "cut corners."

Reliance by Russian troops on unsecured communication devices, including smartphones and push-to-talk radios, has left their units vulnerable to targeting, Western defense and intelligence officials say.

A spokesperson for the BND declined to comment. A government spokesman, Steffen Hebestreit, made an elliptical reference Wednesday to "credible indications" that Russian forces in Bucha were interrogating prisoners "who were subsequently executed." He cited only "insights that we have."

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HEADLINE	04/06 Finland seizes \$46M Russian artwork
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/06/russia-sanctions-finnish-border-art/
GIST	<p>Finnish Customs has seized artwork en route to Russia as part of sanctions imposed by the European Union. The paintings, sculptures and antiquities are worth 42 million euros (\$46 million), the agency said.</p> <p>Last weekend, Finnish Customs stopped three shipments headed to Russia at the Vaalimaa border crossing, the agency said in a news release. The artwork was on loan from Russia to museums and galleries in Japan and Italy.</p> <p>Sami Rakshit, director of Finnish Customs' Enforcement Department, did not specify the exact number of works or give details about the artists in response to queries from The Washington Post.</p> <p>Russia's Culture Ministry was quoted by the Russian news agency Moskva as saying that the artwork had been loaned to Italy from St. Petersburg's Hermitage Museum and Tsarskoye Selo state museum and Moscow's State Tretyakov Gallery, according to Reuters. The Hermitage Museum did not immediately respond to requests for comment.</p>

	<p>The European Union has imposed extensive sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, as has the United States. Finland's Foreign Affairs Ministry confirmed to Finnish Customs that the list of E.U. sanctions includes works of art, the agency said.</p> <p>"It is important that the enforcement of sanctions works effectively. The enforcement of sanctions is part of our normal operations, and we always direct our controls based on risks. The shipments that have now come under criminal investigation were detected as part of our customary enforcement work," Rakshit said.</p> <p>The customs agency has started a preliminary investigation and will continue to consult with the Foreign Affairs Ministry, which will discuss the matter with the European Commission.</p> <p>"Finnish Customs will keep the art seized while they are needed for investigation as evidence. What happens next will depend on the outcome of the investigation," Rakshit told The Post.</p> <p>The artwork seizure comes a week and a half after Finnish Customs seized 21 yachts suspected to be owned by Russian oligarchs.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Cubans arriving record numbers at border
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/07/cuba-migration-border-miami/
GIST	<p>MIAMI — Cuban migrants are coming to the United States in the highest numbers since the 1980 Mariel boatlift, making their way across the U.S. southern land border.</p> <p>Last month, more than 32,000 Cubans were taken into U.S. custody along the Mexico border, double the number who arrived in February, according to unpublished U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) figures obtained by The Washington Post. CBP is on pace to apprehend more than 155,000 Cubans during the current fiscal year, records show, nearly four times the 2021 total and a twelvefold increase over 2020.</p> <p>Many of the new arrivals are flying to Nicaragua, which dropped its visa requirement for Cubans last fall, then traveling overland to either Del Rio, Tex., or Yuma, Ariz., where they surrender to U.S. border agents to begin the asylum application process.</p> <p>Maria Victoria Gonzalez, who arrived in Miami with her husband and two children in January after flying to Nicaragua, described the current exodus from Cuba as "a stampede to Managua," referring to the Central American country's capital. "Almost everyone from the younger generations is leaving," she said.</p> <p>The Cuban migration boom has been largely overlooked amid a record-breaking overall influx under President Biden. CBP arrests along the southern border reached a record 1.73 million during the 2021 fiscal year, and this year's total is on pace to be even higher.</p> <p>The arrival of so many Cubans is straining communities here in South Florida, while acting once more as a release valve for communist authorities facing potential unrest amid the worst economic crisis to grip the island in decades.</p> <p>Michael Bustamante, a Cuba historian at the University of Miami, said the migration surge puts new pressure on the Biden administration to recast its strategy, having left in place most aspects of the "maximum-pressure" Trump administration approach that tightened U.S. economic sanctions. Street protests that flared in Cuban cities last July were viewed as a vindication of that strategy by former president Donald Trump's supporters, Bustamante said, but now the tougher sanctions — combined with Cuba's own economic failures — are supercharging emigration.</p> <p>"People are getting out of Dodge rather than taking to the streets, which is clear evidence the maximum pressure approach doesn't work," Bustamante said. "This is not a win for U.S. policy and not a win for the Cuban people."</p>

Cubans who cross the border illegally face little risk of being quickly deported or “expelled” under the Title 42 public health law that U.S. authorities used to return thousands of Haitian migrants from a Del Rio camp last September. Cubans fleeing the communist system have long received preferential treatment.

According to preliminary data obtained by The Post, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has only deported 20 Cubans in the past five months, and just 95 during the 2021 fiscal year. Authorities deported 1,583 Cubans in 2020, according to ICE data.

In a statement, the Department of Homeland Security said it coordinates with the State Department to hold “regular discussions with partner countries in the Hemisphere on migration related matters” and “continues to engage with foreign governments to improve cooperation with countries that systematically refuse or delay the repatriation of their nationals.” DHS did not respond to questions about specific Cuban government restrictions on the return of Cuban migrants.

About 125,000 Cubans arrived in 1980 during the Mariel boatlift, when the island’s ports and marinas were opened to allow U.S. vessels to pick up anyone wanting to leave. Another 30,000 Cubans reached the United States across the Florida Straits during the 1994 “rafter” crisis.

After that episode, U.S. officials agreed to increase family reunification visas and open a visa lottery system allowing 20,000 Cubans to legally emigrate annually. But those legal pathways were crippled after the State Department removed most consular staff from Cuba in 2017 after the unexplained “health incidents” that became known as Havana syndrome.

Cubans were required to travel to Guyana for visa processing, slowing the entire process and contributing to a large visa backlog.

The U.S. Embassy in Havana said Wednesday it is preparing to restart limited consular services in May, but only for parents of U.S. citizens.

The current volume of migration to the United States far outstrips potential legal pathways. In addition to the flights to Nicaragua, Cubans are also flying there through third countries including Panama. When Panamanian authorities imposed a transit visa requirement for Cuban travelers last month, protesters surrounded the Panamanian Embassy in Havana.

CBP records show about 75 percent of Cubans taken into custody along the Mexico border are adults traveling alone. Some Cubans acknowledge hiring smuggling guides to transport them through Mexico, while others say they rely on social media networks, choosing Del Rio and Yuma for their reputation as relatively safe and easy places to cross.

A smaller number of Cuban migrants, about 750, have reached the United States through other means over the past six months, including one cancer survivor rescued off the Florida Keys in late March on a windsurfing board.

Some Cubans are being released at the border with a form of provisional legal status known as humanitarian parole, but others are being referred to ICE or U.S. immigration courts to face deportation proceedings. U.S. authorities say they issue humanitarian parole on a case-by-case basis, but have not explained how they make those determinations.

Santiago Alpizar, an immigration attorney in South Florida, said he has gotten so many cases in recent months that he is no longer able to see new clients in April. They are recorded as having arrived illegally, meaning they don’t automatically qualify for the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 that allows Cubans to apply for a green card after a year in the United States.

“The majority of my cases now need to apply for asylum,” he said.

Alpizar — who fled by sea in the 1994 crisis — has been writing letters to Cuban American politicians urging them to reinstate the visa lottery as well as the family reunification program. Many of the Cubans heading for Nicaragua have been separated from spouses, children and other close family members for years with little or no access to a U.S. visa application process.

Oasis Peña, a community activist in Miami, said the massive new wave of Cuban arrivals is already putting a strain on agencies that work with migrants. At Integrum Medical Group, where she helps connect Cubans with social services, people begin queuing up the night before to sign up for benefits such as food stamps and legal assistance.

“There are so many people,” she said. “It’s humanly impossible to serve everyone.”

Peña, who arrived to the United States at age 14, has worked with migrants for three decades. “I have never seen this amount of people arriving through the border,” she said.

Gonzalez — who arrived with family in Miami in January — left the island days after Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, a longtime ally of the Cuban government, lifted visa requirements.

As a journalism professor in the central Cuban city of Santa Clara, Gonzalez, 36, said she earned the equivalent of around \$100 per month. Her husband, an instructor of mechanical engineering, earned less. Their combined income was hardly enough to feed their two children, she said.

Their situation grew more precarious during the pandemic, as Cuba’s economy experienced its worst contraction since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Prices soared as Cuba’s leaders implemented a painful currency reform in early 2021. Lines to buy basic goods such as meat and cooking oil stretched for hours. And the government’s repressive response to the July 11, 2021 protests — when authorities handed down lengthy prison sentences — made it clear for many young Cubans that change was unlikely any time soon.

The Nicaragua route finally gave Cubans such as Gonzalez a route that seemed reasonably safe. With the help of her U.S. relatives, the family bought four tickets to Managua at \$3,400 each — with demand so high, commercial and charter airlines are gouging travelers, according to migrants.

At the airport in Cuba, Gonzalez said so many people were boarding the flight that there was not a single free seat in the waiting area. Other passengers described selling all of their belongings — including houses and cars — to finance the journeys. Many had paid huge sums to purchase their tickets, with one couple paying \$4,500 each.

No one carried heavy suitcases. When the plane finally took off from Cuba, some onboard clapped.

Gonzalez and her family arrived in the middle of the night and checked in at a hotel before embarking on a journey that would take a month to reach the U.S. border. They took buses and taxis, stopping from time to time to rest and figure out their next steps. Gonzalez said they were never stopped or detained by Mexican authorities, nor asked to show their passports.

Along the trip, they told their children — ages 8 and 4 — that they were going to visit their grandfather in the United States, little by little revealing that they were about to embark on a new life.

The last leg of the journey was the one Gonzalez said she remembers most vividly. Though many are crossing at the Rio Grande, Gonzalez had heard stories of people drowning and was too afraid. Instead they decided to cross through the desert in Arizona.

They started around 9 p.m. with a group that swelled to 30 to 40 people. Her 4-year-old son was wearing tennis shoes with flashing lights. Someone told her it’d be best if she took them off, as they might attract attention. It was cold but he’d have to arrive to the United States shoeless. Her husband carried him on her back, while Gonzalez held her daughter’s hand.

	<p>Quickly — almost running — they raced toward Yuma.</p> <p>Within 20 minutes, they were in Arizona, seated on benches next to the border wall. Patrol agents processed them and the other families with children first. They spent the next three days in CBP custody. Then they were released, catching a bus to Phoenix, then a flight to Miami.</p> <p>Three months later, their daughter is now enrolled in school. They’ve applied for their son to join a prekindergarten program next year. “We know we have to start from zero,” Gonzalez said. “We are aware nothing is easy. But we are full of hope.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Calif. record heat; snowpack nears 70yr-low
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/04/06/california-record-heat-snowpack/
GIST	<p>It’s only early April but spring’s first substantial bout of hot weather is set to scorch large parts of California on Thursday. The pulse of heat should be fairly short-lived, lasting only a couple of days, but scores of records could fall between Thursday and Friday.</p> <p>The abnormally high temperatures are the result of a dome of high pressure sprawled over the western United States. Long-term warming from human-caused climate change also increases the frequency and intensity of such events.</p> <p>The heat comes as April snowpack in the Sierra Nevada has dropped to one of its lowest levels in 70 years due to a record lack of precipitation in January, February and March. The high temperatures will further melt what little snow remains.</p> <p>The National Weather Service is predicting temperatures 10 to 25 degrees above normal over most of California on Thursday and Friday. The biggest differences from normal are forecast for the central and northern portions of the state.</p> <p>This equates to widespread high temperatures in the 80s and 90s, even along the coast on Thursday. Some of the hottest weather is projected for the Central Valley both Thursday and Friday, with record-setting highs from 90 to 95 degrees. Sacramento, Redding and Stockton could all approach or surpass records.</p> <p>“[T]he much advertised and talked about mini-heat wave is still on track,” the Weather Service office serving the Bay Area writes. Its forecast discussion says the warm-up is considered “extreme” compared to what is typical for this time of year.</p> <p>Temperatures may fall short of records in the Bay Area, but the high in San Francisco on Thursday is forecast to be in the mid-80s, about 20 degrees above normal. Temperatures are expected to pull back on Friday as winds come in from the Pacific, with a high closer to 70.</p> <p>In Southern California, temperatures are also likely to be considerably above normal both Thursday and Friday. The forecast high in Los Angeles are in the low 90s compared to an average in the low 70s. On Friday, some record highs are possible. Heat advisories are in effect for much of southwest California until then.</p> <p>“Drink plenty of fluids, stay in an air-conditioned room, stay out of the sun, and check up on relatives and neighbors,” the advisory states. “Young children and pets should never be left unattended in vehicles under any circumstances.”</p> <p>Heat to further deplete snowpack amid drought</p> <p>Temperatures in the Sierra Nevada are predicted to rise into the 60s and even the 70s and 80s in the lower elevations, further melting a depleted snowpack.</p>

	<p>“Needless to say, it will feel like near-summer late this week,” the Weather Service in Reno, Nev., writes.</p> <p>On Friday, the California Department of Water Resources conducted its monthly snow survey at Phillips Station in the Sierra Nevada. It measured only 2.5 inches of snow, 4 percent of the average for the date at that location. January, February and March were the driest period on record for the Sierra.</p> <p>The latest federal drought monitor shows the entirety of California facing drought conditions. The long-range outlook is for the drought to persist or worsen.</p> <p>Cooler times ahead along with some precipitation</p> <p>The hot weather pattern through Friday will not be sustained. A cool front is expected to drop south across California over the weekend.</p> <p>Computer model simulations “give high confidence in a pattern change by Sunday with a significant drop in temperatures,” the Weather Service office in Sacramento writes.</p> <p>The cool pattern should endure for much of next week across the western United States, and some beneficial rain and mountain snow are expected, mainly in the northern and central part of California. However, a warm, dry pattern may return by the second half of the month.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Firms still wrestle with exiting Russia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/04/06/month-into-war-these-companies-still-struggle-exit-russia/
GIST	<p>Businesses have found it increasingly hard to justify continued operations in Russia as troubling images of death and despair filter out of Ukraine and Western governments take steps to further isolate Russia economically.</p> <p>Chip-making giant Intel is the latest global corporation to halt business in Russia, saying in a statement Wednesday that it was calling for “a swift return to peace.” The same day, the White House announced a new sanctions package that includes a prohibition on new investment in Russia by any U.S. person — a measure that legal experts said could hasten the departure of many more firms lingering in the country.</p> <p>The investment ban comes after more than 600 multinational corporations announced plans to voluntarily exit Russia, while making the country less attractive to those businesses that plan to stay. At least 155 companies have resisted demands to exit or reduce activities there while another 96 are holding off on new investments or trying to buy time, according to Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, a Yale professor who is tracking corporate investments in Russia.</p> <p>“You don’t have to eat at McDonald’s to feel the impact of its closure,” said Aaron Klein, a senior fellow at Brookings Institution. “For average Russian people, seeing name-brand Western companies exit Russia is a message that they are at risk of returning to the Soviet era of society.”</p> <p>Intel’s exit comes after more than two decades of business collaboration at a research and development facility near Moscow, where teams of engineers would work on advanced chip technology for use around the world.</p> <p>The company said it is halting business operations there “effective immediately” in response to Moscow’s unprovoked attack on neighboring Ukraine, according to a Wednesday statement on its website. It stopped all shipments to Russia and Belarus on March 3, and has previously issued statements condemning the violence.</p> <p>“We are working to support all of our employees through this difficult situation, including our 1,200 employees in Russia,” the company wrote in an unsigned statement. “We have also implemented business continuity measures to minimize disruption to our global operations.”</p>

In announcing the new sanction measures, the Treasury Department also said it would prevent U.S. banks from processing Russian debt payments in dollars, pushing the country closer to default. If early sanctions were meant to sever Russia's ties to global business community, the ones announced Wednesday were meant to make that split-up permanent.

"Today's [executive order] will ensure the enduring weakening of the Russian Federation's global competitiveness," reads a White House fact sheet on the new measures.

The ban on investments is not clear-cut for many American businesses that continue to operate factories and other facilities in Russia. Over time, maintaining those facilities will require some form of investment, which could force the United States to scrutinize individual company decisions, said Ariel Cohen, a nonresident senior fellow at Atlantic Council, a think tank.

"Is the investment to refurbish existing production lines? If you need to replace machine parts, even whole machines, is it caught in those sanctions?" Cohen asked. "The answer is between Treasury and the legal interpretations on a case-by-case basis."

Koch Industries, which operates a large glass-producing business in Russia, has already suspended new capital investments but has balked at closing them.

In an emailed statement Wednesday, company spokesman David Dziok said Koch would "comply with all applicable sanctions, laws and regulations" concerning its operations, and that it would "closely monitor the situation and modify our decisions as circumstances warrant."

In a March 24 email to employees, president and chief operating officer Dave Robertson said abandoning its glass plants in Russia would "do more harm than good" because it would leave employees open to prosecution or harassment by Russian authorities. Plus, he added, Moscow would seize the plants and keep them open anyway.

"If [Koch] were to walk away from these glass facilities, it would give full control of the assets to the Russian government, who we believe would keep them running and capture 100 percent of the financial benefit," Robertson wrote.

In the letter, Robertson also said the company "condemns the heinous actions of the Russian government in Ukraine."

Some legal experts believed the Biden administration purposely left the definition of "investments" ambiguous to force companies to make their own determinations of how much legal risk they want to take on by continuing Russian operations. Many businesses probably will err on the side of caution, said David Szakonyi, an assistant professor of political science at George Washington University.

"Companies doing business in Russia are going to have to spend a lot of time and resources to fully understand this new investments rule, which could in turn create enough motivation to completely pull out of the Russian market to avoid running afoul or crossing the line," Szakonyi said.

"The executive order bans new investment so it wouldn't impact existing plants," the Treasury Department said in a statement. "As is standard with the implementation other executive orders, Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control will issue additional public guidance for the private sector. Every business is dealing with different circumstances and we are in close contact with the private sector to address individual questions."

Sonnenfeld said the investment ban is likely to have minimal impact on companies' long-term plans, as few multinationals want to pursue new Russian investments at this point. Some may try to redefine what counts as a new investment, as opposed to a capital upgrade meant to maintain existing operations.

Return to Top	<p>The White House continued to grant exemptions for businesses that are supporting sectors important to humanitarian activities, which it specified to include food and agricultural commodities, medicine and telecommunications services that connect the Russian people to the outside world.</p> <p>Several U.S. corporations cited that exemption to justify continued sales there, including Cargill, one of the world's largest agricultural companies. Last month it suspended all investments in Russia but said it would maintain a staff of about 2,500 there to continue providing "essential food" such as bread, infant formula and cereal.</p> <p>For other companies, the decision to pull out of Russia is complicated by contracts with business partners. Major U.S. hotel chains, including Hyatt and Hilton, continue to operate hotels in the country that are owned by third-party companies.</p> <p>A Hyatt spokesperson said the company is "currently assessing the new measures and [continues] to evaluate our existing agreements with the third-party entities that own Hyatt hotels in Russia." Meg Ryan, a spokeswoman for Hilton, said the company would continue to comply with all applicable trade sanctions.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 DEA warns fentanyl mass-overdose events
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/law-enforcement-and-public-safety/dea-warns-of-increase-in-mass-overdose-events-involving-deadly-fentanyl/
GIST	<p>Today, the Drug Enforcement Administration sent a letter to federal, state, and local law enforcement partners warning of a nationwide spike in fentanyl-related mass-overdose events. Administrator Anne Milgram outlined the current threat and offered DEA support to law enforcement officers responding to these tragic incidents.</p> <p>"Fentanyl is killing Americans at an unprecedented rate," said DEA Administrator Anne Milgram. "Already this year, numerous mass-overdose events have resulted in dozens of overdoses and deaths. Drug traffickers are driving addiction, and increasing their profits, by mixing fentanyl with other illicit drugs. Tragically, many overdose victims have no idea they are ingesting deadly fentanyl, until it's too late."</p> <p>Fentanyl-related mass-overdose events, characterized as three or more overdoses occurring close in time and at the same location, have happened in at least seven American cities in recent months, resulting in 58 overdoses and 29 deaths. Cities impacted include Wilton Manors, Florida; Austin, Texas; Cortez, Colorado; Commerce City, Colorado; Omaha, Nebraska; St. Louis, Missouri; and Washington, D.C.</p> <p>Tragic events like these are being driven by fentanyl. Fentanyl is highly-addictive, found in all 50 states, and drug traffickers are increasingly mixing it with other illicit drugs—in powder and pill form—in an effort to drive addiction and attract repeat buyers. These mass-overdose events typically occur in one of the following recurring scenarios: when drug dealers sell their product as "cocaine," when it actually contains fentanyl; or when drug dealers sell pills designed to appear nearly identical to legitimate prescriptions, but are actually fake prescription pills containing fentanyl. This is creating a frightening nationwide trend where many overdose victims are dying after unknowingly ingesting fentanyl.</p> <p>Fentanyl is driving the nationwide overdose epidemic. The CDC estimates that in the 12-month period ending in October 2021, more than 105,000 Americans died of drug overdoses, with 66 percent of those deaths related to synthetic opioids like fentanyl. Last year, the United States suffered more fentanyl-related deaths than gun- and auto-related deaths combined.</p> <p>When a mass-overdose event occurs, DEA stands ready to offer all available resources to assist law enforcement partners, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdicting the substance that is driving the spike in overdoses;

- Investigating and identifying the dealers and larger drug trafficking organizations responsible for the overdose event;
- Providing priority access to all of DEA's resources, including its labs, chemists, and overdose subject matter experts;
- Assisting with the presentation of the investigation to federal prosecutors; and
- Warning the public about the lethal drug threat.

In a call with Administrator Milgram on Tuesday, senior law enforcement officials expressed appreciation for DEA's commitment and partnership to address the increase in fentanyl-related overdoses and the crimes associated with drug trafficking.

"Fentanyl poisonings are at an all-time high," said Sheriff Mike Milstead, Minnehaha County, South Dakota Chair, Drug Enforcement Committee, National Sheriffs' Association. "These are not isolated incidents. These are happening in every state and every county in America, leaving behind grieving families. Let us be clear: These poisonings are part of a strategic maneuver by the cartels and it must be stopped. The nation's Sheriffs appreciate the spotlight that the Drug Enforcement Administration has put on this horrifying spike of fentanyl poisonings and is committed to putting an end to this tragic trajectory."

"We applaud the DEA for their leadership and initiatives regarding the investigation of mass-overdose events which have been occurring around the country, including in many of our major cities," said Chief Jeri Williams, Phoenix Police Department Chief, and President of the Major Cities Chiefs Association. "These casualties are plaguing our communities, and increased partnership and collaboration with our federal partners is most welcomed in order to stop these tragedies from occurring."

"We must utilize all available resources to combat the opioid and fentanyl epidemic that continues to plague this great nation, said Sheriff Dennis M. Lemma, President of Major County Sheriffs of America. "In addition to those resources, we must shift how we respond to an overdose, no longer treating them as accidental deaths, but instead as a homicide crime scene. These individuals are victims of a greater problem, and we are committed to putting an end to these deaths."

DEA is working diligently to trace mass-overdose events back to the local drug trafficking organizations and international cartels responsible for the surging domestic supply of fentanyl. DEA continues to seize fentanyl at record rates. In the first three months of 2022, DEA has seized almost 2,000 pounds of fentanyl and one million fake pills. Last year, DEA seized more than 15,000 pounds of fentanyl—four times the amount seized in 2017—which is enough to kill every American.

Today's warning expands on DEA's September 2021 Public Safety Alert on the increase in the availability and accessibility of fake prescription pills containing fentanyl.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Professionalism complaints against SPD
SOURCE	https://publicola.com/2022/04/06/professionalism-complaints-make-up-largest-number-of-spd-misconduct-allegations/
GIST	<p>An annual report by Seattle's Office of Police Accountability (OPA) released on Tuesday contained a revealing statistic: Of the nearly 1,500 misconduct allegations brought against Seattle police officers last year, the largest number—more than 20 percent—involved unprofessional behavior. In one well-publicized case, an officer refused to wear a mask inside Harborview Medical Center; in another, an officer referred to a trans protester as "that."</p> <p>The Seattle Police Department's professionalism standards are broad, so unprofessional conduct can include anything from insulting a member of the public to covering up mistakes. Consequences for unprofessional behavior are generally light, typically ranging from "training referrals"—often a conversation with an officers' supervisor—to written reprimands that appear on an officer's permanent record. In certain</p>

cases, the OPA can resolve complaints quickly through a process called “rapid adjudication”; however, the OPA did not resolve any complaints through rapid adjudication in 2021.

While a federal court has tracked SPD’s progress toward reducing racially biased policing and excessive force for the past decade, professionalism issues have not sparked similar scrutiny. Recent OPA data suggests that officers accused of violating SPD’s professionalism standards are more likely to be disciplined—more than half of the misconduct cases the OPA sustained since January involved unprofessional behavior—but in reviews of SPD practices by accountability agencies, professionalism concerns draw only brief attention. The Office of the Inspector General’s most recent assessment of SPD’s protest response in 2020, for instance, suggested that “SPD officers should eliminate their use of sarcasm or confrontational dialogue with protesters” but made no other mentions of unprofessional behavior.

Seattle City Councilmember Lisa Herbold, who chairs the council’s public safety committee, told PubliCola that professionalism issues within SPD aren’t new, though the OPA’s recent policy recommendations for SPD generally have not addressed those problems.

Some accountability advocates say that although systemic reviews of SPD pay relatively little attention to professionalism complaints, disrespectful or unprofessional treatment of the public by police officers still matters. “The issue of professionalism and the police force cuts to the heart of culture change,” said Leslie Cushman, a spokesperson for the Washington Coalition for Police Accountability. “Disrespect is disregard, it is dehumanizing, and it is thumbing their nose.”

According to the OPA’s report, bias allegations were the second most common source of misconduct complaints, making up about 12 percent of all allegations. The number of complaints about excessive force fell by more than half from 2020 to 2021, though much of the increase in 2020 was driven by SPD’s response to city-wide protests.

The OPA sustained a quarter of misconduct allegations in 2021—an 8 percent increase over the year before. Of the 98 SPD employees disciplined for misconduct, 10 were subject to multiple OPA investigations. Two of the four employees SPD fired in 2021 [were terminated for their presence at the US Capitol during an attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 election on January 6, 2021](#); the OPA also found that the officers, Alexander Everett and Caitlin Rochelle, had lied to investigators about their location during the attack. Meanwhile, officers appealed 13 OPA decisions in 2021, including [six officers suspended for misconduct](#). As of the end of 2021, 93 of the 101 disciplinary appeals brought to arbitrators by SPD officers since 2016 were still unresolved.

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HEADLINE	04/07 Fighting intrusion, theft, terror on railways
SOURCE	https://www.securitymagazine.com/articles/97381-combatting-intrusion-theft-and-terrorism-on-railways-with-security-and-surveillance-technology
GIST	<p>Rail infrastructure is a fundamental component of the United States economy and transportation system; in many ways, it is the lifeblood of the economy. For example, US freight rail alone supports approximately 1.1 million jobs, directly generates \$219 billion in economic output and \$26 billion in tax revenues, and millions more Americans indirectly benefit by working in competitive industries, thanks to the affordability and productivity of freight railroads. That impact is not limited to the United States; passenger and freight traffic combined are expected to double globally by 2050, so the criticality of protecting rail infrastructure will only grow in step with its usage.</p> <p>Protecting rail infrastructure does not come without its challenges, however. Rail assets are uniquely complex environments with countless variables that are spread across a vast geographic area. Rail operators routinely face a wide array of hazards. Although there is a litany of natural incidents they must be cognizant of, unfortunately, there are also many intentional human security hazards that must be addressed, lest disaster strike.</p>

Security incidents that affect railways usually fall into one of three categories: intrusion, theft, or terrorism. To keep passengers and freight safe, there must be significant efforts towards maintaining the physical security of railways. It is critical that rail organizations take action to ensure they are making safety and security a top priority by embracing innovative technologies that help mitigate these threats to public safety.

Intrusion is a serious issue in the rail industry as trespassing along railroads' rights-of-way is the leading cause of rail-related deaths in America. Nationally, more than [400 trespass fatalities](#) and nearly as many injuries occur each year. While not all instances of trespassing lead to injury or death, they all lead to disruption. When people trespass on railways and vandalize property, the railway must be evaluated to ensure there is no major damage or maintenance required before allowing the trains to resume running. This creates delays and costs to repair any damage.

With regard to theft, cable theft, in particular, is currently plaguing the rail industry due to economic instability coupled with higher commodity prices. For rail operators, cable theft can lead to severe delays and costly consequences. In the United Kingdom, cable theft was responsible for nearly 22,000 hours of passenger delays in the past four years, resulting in costs of [more than \\$80 million](#). Railway networks are designed to be fail safe; therefore, trains are brought to a complete stop when a cable is cut. While this protects passengers, it also leads to long and aggravating delays as the cable is replaced. Not only is cable theft disruptive for passengers and railway operators, but it is potentially fatal for the perpetrator. There are thousands of volts of electricity running through cables, and any interference with them is extremely dangerous. When examining the dangers, resulting downtime, product replacement cost, and additional labor expenses, it becomes clear why cable theft is such a serious and costly issue that must be addressed.

Another challenge, with potentially catastrophic consequences, is terrorism. Rail operators need the necessary tools to combat interference with rail infrastructure and its assets. Between 1970 and the end of 2017, there were [282 attempts to deliberately derail trains](#) and 817 additional attacks on railway infrastructure, including tracks, bridges, tunnels, signaling, and other right-of-way equipment. Of the 282 attempts to derail trains, 118 (or 42%) resulted in a derailment.

It is clear that railways have a broad spectrum of needs and challenges, and preventing intrusion, theft, and terrorism on railways must be a fundamental component of rail safety efforts. Operators need an integrated range of security and surveillance technologies to detect, assess, and respond to threats faster and collaborate with outside organizations as needed.

[Emerging technologies](#), such as 3D surveillance systems, can be united with security, dispatching, and collaboration software to address the entire lifecycle of an incident. The combination of fixed and mobile sensors on trains, tracks and other infrastructure integrated with artificial intelligence enables the highest levels of monitoring through automated detection of anomalies and potential safety impacts.

The Březno tunnel, the second-longest Czech railway tunnel, is [implementing a security system](#) based on LiDAR detection of moving objects. When it senses movement, cameras point directly to the alarm origin and follow the intruder. This enables targets to be viewed from multiple angles autonomously without an operator's intervention.

When a security incident has been detected, operators can leverage dispatch and collaboration software for managing the response. For example, the Emergency Response System of the Gotthard Base Tunnel, the world's longest tunnel, includes dispatching software that supports operating personnel via checklists, situation plans and instructions to schedule and mobilize intervention teams.

Rail networks are continuing to expand, such as in the United States, which recently passed a \$1.2 billion [infrastructure bill](#) that included significant funding for rail. But more rail infrastructure means there are more steps needed to address potential attempts at intrusion, theft, and terrorism. Rail operators must rise to the challenge of providing safe and efficient passage of lives and property.

HEADLINE	04/07 Chechen leader: ready to finish job Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/world/putin-ally-chechen-leader-telegram-brutalities-fractures-kremlin
GIST	<p>As Ukrainian and Western officials have decried the atrocities witnessed in the Bucha massacre and around Kyiv, a hardened Chechen fighter and close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin has been posting videos to his Telegram channel saying his men stand ready to finish the job in Ukraine.</p> <p>Ramzan Kadyrov, leader of the majority Muslim Chechen Republic, has reportedly visited the badly bombarded port city of Mariupol on the Black Sea as Russian troops have pulled back from the capital region around Kyiv and are regrouping to focus their offensive on southeastern Ukraine.</p> <p>Western countries upped their sanctions against Moscow Wednesday in an effort to cripple the Russian war machine after photos surfaced showing corpses in civilian clothing lining the streets of Bucha, some with their hands behind their backs and showing signs of rape and torture.</p> <p>Defense experts told Fox News Digital signs of such killings are remnants of Chechen fighters or Wagner Group mercenaries who the Kremlin reportedly had been flying into Ukraine throughout the war effort to hunt down and kill Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.</p> <p>Conscript soldiers, regular infantrymen serving in the Russian forces, would be less likely to be trained to round up civilians so efficiently and brutally execute them as evidence in Bucha and around Kyiv suggests.</p> <p>In an address to the U.N. Security Council Tuesday, Zelenskyy, speaking remotely from Ukraine, pointed out how some of the corpses had their tongues cut out, something "terrorists" have done in other territories.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Kadyrov, remaining active on his Telegram channel, released a video of his men sword fighting Wednesday. He said they are ready to "go on the attack with sabers."</p> <p>The intention behind the video remained unclear, but the Chechen leader, who once fought against Russia before he and his father changed allegiance to Moscow, has allowed himself to openly criticize the Kremlin in recent days, signaling potential fractures between Russian leadership as the war drags on for more than 40 days.</p> <p>Taking to Telegram again, Kadyrov criticized Dmitry Peskov, a Kremlin spokesman and Putin's chief press officer, on Sunday for defending Russian TV host Ivan Urgant, who fled the country after criticizing the war in Ukraine, according to The Washington Examiner. Kadyrov said Peskov ought to be more respectful of his Chechen fighters who "sit in a cold trench for several days."</p> <p>He also slammed Peskov for failing to congratulate him after Putin awarded Kadyrov the lieutenant general rank in recognition of Chechen military service in Ukraine. The Chechen fighter added that Peskov's "priority scale" is off kilter, suggesting, "We need to do something about it."</p> <p>Throughout the war, Kadyrov and his men have been sharing propaganda videos on his Telegram channel, recently claiming that trucks were arriving from Chechnya to supply humanitarian aid to Mariupol. But Ukrainian officials say those materials were looted from local civilians.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 US Postal Service postage rate increase
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/usps-postage-rate-increase-louis-dejoy/
GIST	<p>The U.S. Postal Service said on Wednesday that it wants to increase postage rates this summer — less than one year after it last increased the price for a first-class Forever stamp. The new price would rise to 60 cents from its current 58 cents, which the postal service said represents a hike that's lower than the current rate of inflation.</p>

The higher stamp price would take effect on July 10, or 11 months after its [postage rate increase](#) in August, when stamps went from 55 cents to 58 cents. That means customers would be paying 9% more for postage compared with prices less than a year ago, or above the 7.9% rate of inflation in February.

"Abysmal service"

It's not only that Americans are paying more for postage — they're also getting less for their money, said Paul Steidler, senior fellow at the conservative-leaning Lexington Institute and an expert on the postal service. The USPS has cut its delivery standards during the past year, part of Postmaster General Louis DeJoy's plan to put the money-losing agency back on a path to profitability.

But the postal service isn't even meeting its [lower delivery standards](#), Steidler said. "It's one thing to have price increases, but it's another to have absolutely abysmal service accompanying that price increase. The price increase is not in the best interest of the American people."

The announcement comes on the same day that President Biden is scheduled to sign the [Postal Service Reform Act of 2022](#) into law. That legislation will provide \$107 billion in direct and indirect support for the USPS, such as by allowing future retirees to enroll in Medicare and end a requirement that the agency pre-fund workers' health care benefits for the next 75 years.

The Postal Service said the price increase will help the agency implement DeJoy's 10-year plan, known as the "Delivering for America" [plan](#). USPS also pointed to inflation and increased operating expenses as a reason for its rate hike.

The agency said it has proposed the rate hike to the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC), the federal regulator that oversees the postal agency, but the PRC only issues advisory opinions. In other words, if the USPS wants to increase the rates, it will move forward with it regardless of the PRC's response, Steidler noted.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Airlines cancel flights: staffing shortages
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mask-rules-airlines-cancel-hundreds-of-flights-due-to-covid-easy-jet-british-airways/
GIST	<p>Overseas airlines are having to cancel hundreds of flights as they grapple with coronavirus-related staffing shortages weeks after they ditched rules requiring passengers and staff to mask up in the air.</p> <p>The disruptions also come as the CEOs of leading U.S. airlines urge the Biden administration to roll back a federal rule requiring that masks be worn in the sky.</p> <p>Masks have not been required on flights operated by budget-friendly, Swiss airline EasyJet since March 27, the airline said in a statement. The move came after the UK removed all travel restrictions earlier in March.</p> <p>"This welcome move by the UK Government marks a return to truly restriction-free flying to and from the UK, giving an extra boost to travel this Easter. We are looking ahead to what we expect to be a strong summer for EasyJet, with plans to return to near 2019 levels of flying. We can't wait to welcome more customers back on board," EasyJet CEO Johan Lundgren said in a statement at the time.</p> <p>Between March 28 and April 3, EasyJet cancelled 202 of its 3,517 flights scheduled to depart from the UK, according to data provided to CBS MoneyWatch from Cirium, an aviation analytics company. By comparison, the carrier cancelled zero flights departing from the UK during the same period in 2019, before the pandemic.</p> <p>An EasyJet spokesperson attributed the increase in cancelled flights to "higher than usual staff sickness levels" due to a recent surge in COVID-19 cases across Europe.</p>

"As a result, we have made pre-emptive cancellations so customers can be notified in advance of travel and are able to move easily onto alternative flights," the spokesperson said in a statement to CBS MoneyWatch.

According to Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding, an epidemiologist and health economist at Harvard Chan School of Public Health, such flight cancellations were all but guaranteed once passengers and crew members took off their masks.

"So damn predictable — UK govt drops restrictions, airlines like @easyJet drops masks ... and less than 2 weeks later ... huge spike in pilots and flight attendants out sick with #COVID19 unable to work, and 120 flights cancelled! Airline CEOs asked for this," he said on Twitter.

A similar move by U.S. airlines "would backfire in many ways," Feigl-Ding told CBS MoneyWatch. He thinks more passengers would hesitate to fly if airlines ditch mask rules. "If there are no masks, that actually makes people more worried about taking the trip. It might make more people stay home and bite the airlines," he said.

Although staffing shortages related to rising COVID-19 rates in Europe are disrupting other sectors, they're particularly acute in the airline industry.

"It's very clear that the airline industry is particularly vulnerable, and this creates a cascading effect on society more than, say, a restaurant closing would," Feigl-Ding said. "This is critical infrastructure and these are essential employees, and we're endangering our economy. Stopping COVID is good for our economy, 'letting it rip' is the exact opposite."

Other airlines that have dropped mask rules are also cancelling more flights than usual. On flights operated by London, England-based airline British Airways, masks have been optional for staff and passengers since March 16. The airline made the announcement on [Twitter](#) by sharing a video of a flight attendant enthusiastically tearing off a surgical mask.

Between March 28 and April 3, British Airways cancelled 393 of 2,405 flights scheduled to depart from the UK, according to Cirium.

A British Airways spokesperson said that only a small share of its recently cancelled flights were scrapped because of COVID-19. The spokesperson said the airline on Tuesday cancelled three flights at the last minute due to personnel testing positive for the disease, adding that some of the cancellations stemmed from issues related to rebuilding "operations while managing the continuing impact of COVID."

"So while the vast majority of our flights continue to operate as planned, as a precaution we've slightly reduced our schedule between now and the end of May as we ramp back up," the spokesperson said.

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HEADLINE	04/06 FDA warns norovirus contaminated oysters
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/oysters-norovirus-fda-raw-oysters-cdc-canada/
GIST	<p>Public health officials are warning restaurants and retailers not to serve or sell potentially contaminated raw oysters linked to a norovirus outbreak that's sickened at least 91 people in more than a dozen U.S. states and 279 more in Canada.</p> <p>Possibly tainted raw oysters harvested in British Columbia, Canada, were distributed in California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Texas and Washington, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration stated in a post updated on Wednesday.</p> <p>At least 91 norovirus illnesses had been reported from those 13 states, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Many of the sick people reported eating raw oysters when interviewed by state and local public health officials, the CDC noted.</p>

Those stricken include 29 [Minnesotans who fell ill after eating raw oysters](#) at Travail Kitchen on March 20. The restaurant has since stopped serving the Stellar Bay Gold oysters.

Washington state officials on Tuesday [said](#) that 26 residents had reported norovirus-like symptoms after eating oysters from British Columbia since March 7.

It's possible that additional states also received these oysters, which federal and state officials are working to remove from the food supply, according to the FDA.

Canadian public health officials [say](#) there have been 279 cases of norovirus and gastrointestinal illness linked to oysters from British Columbia in that province as well as in Alberta, Ontario and Saskatchewan. Those stricken became sick between mid-January and late last month, with no deaths reported.

Oysters can cause illness if eaten raw, especially in those with compromised immune systems. Food contaminated with norovirus may look, smell and taste normal.

Norovirus infects and sickens people 12 to 48 hours after exposure, and symptoms include diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, stomach pain, fever, headache and body ache. Most people recover without treatment, but in some people — the very young, older adults and those with weakened immune systems — norovirus infection can cause severe dehydration and even [death](#).

Norovirus is the leading cause of food-borne illness in the United States, with about 2,500 reported outbreaks each year. Beyond consuming contaminated food or water, people can get norovirus from other infected people or from touching contaminated surfaces and putting unwashed hands in one's mouth.

Norovirus is sometimes called the stomach flu, despite the illness being unrelated to the flu, which is caused by the influenza virus.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Covid increases risk of blood clots later?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-19-infection-increases-risk-blood-clots-months/story?id=83908574
GIST	<p>Being infected with COVID-19 raises the risk of developing serious blood clots, a new study suggests.</p> <p>An international team of researchers from Sweden, the United Kingdom and Finland compared more than 1 million people in Sweden with a confirmed case of the virus between February 2020 and May 2021 to 4 million control patients who tested negative.</p> <p>They found three to six months after contracting COVID-19, patients were at increased risk of being diagnosed with blood clots in their legs or lungs, according to results published in the journal BMJ on Wednesday.</p> <p>Specifically, patients had a 4% raised risk of deep vein thrombosis, a blood clot that forms deep in the thigh or the lower leg, up to three months after a COVID-19 infection.</p> <p>Patients also had a 17% heightened risk of developing a pulmonary embolism, a clot that develops in a blood vessel and travels to a lung artery, up to six months after having the virus.</p> <p>The team said its results add to a growing body of evidence about the link between COVID-19 and serious blood clots, while adding new information about how long the risk might last.</p> <p>"The present findings have major policy implications," the authors wrote, adding that the report "strengthens the importance of vaccination against COVID-19."</p>

They also said the findings suggest that COVID-19 patients -- "especially high-risk patients" -- should take anticoagulation medicine, which are medications to help prevent these clots.

During the course of the study period, the team saw 401 cases of DVT among the COVID-19 patients, compared to 267 cases among the negative patients.

Meanwhile, there were 1,761 cases of PE among virus patients in comparison with 171 cases among the control patients.

COVID-19 patients were at higher risk of blood clots if they had underlying conditions, had a severe case of the virus or if they were infected during the first wave of the pandemic in early 2020.

However, there wasn't just a risk of blood clots. The study also found an increased risk of any kind of bleeding up to two months after a COVID-19 infection.

The team noted there were limitations, including that the study was observational rather than a randomized controlled trial.

Additionally, the researchers recognized that clotting in COVID-19 patients may be underdiagnosed and information about patients' vaccination status was not available.

Despite the risk of blood clots following COVID-19 infections being well-documented, it's unknown what biological mechanisms are at play. However, there are theories.

One [study](#) from Michigan Medicine and the U.S. National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute suggested "rogue" antibodies from a COVID-19 infection cause blood cells to lose their anti-clotting properties.

Another [study](#) from Yale School of Medicine suggested specific proteins are produced by endothelial cells -- cells that line blood vessels -- due to inflammation from the virus and lead to blood clots.

"It remains to be established whether SARS-CoV-2 infection increases the risk of venous thromboembolism or bleeding more than it does for respiratory infections, such as influenza, but also whether the period of [anticoagulation medicine] after COVID-19 should be extended," the authors wrote.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Shanghai allows some parents stay w/kids
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/shanghai-parents-stay-covid-infected-kids-83903344
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- Following a public uproar, Shanghai is allowing at least some parents to stay with children infected with COVID-19, making an exception to a policy of isolating anyone who tests positive.</p> <p>The announcement came as China's largest city remained in lockdown and conducted more mass testing Wednesday following another jump in new cases.</p> <p>A top city health official said at a news conference that parents can apply to stay with children with "special needs" and accompany them if they fully comprehend the health risks and sign an agreement.</p> <p>The parents must wear masks, dine at a different time than their children, avoid sharing items with them and strictly follow all regulations, said Wu Qianyu of the Shanghai Municipal Health Commission. She did not define what qualifies as "special needs."</p> <p>Her announcement followed Chinese state media reports a day earlier that an isolation site set up at the Shanghai New International Expo Center was accepting children with parents. The city has opened sprawling isolation centers for tens of thousands of people to isolate the growing number of positive cases.</p>

Reports that parents were being separated from their infected children had sparked a wave of protest online last weekend, fueled by photos showing several children in each cot with no parents in sight.

Shanghai reported 17,077 new cases detected over the previous day, all but 311 of them in people who showed no symptoms. Under China's zero-COVID approach, the city requires all those who test positive to be held in designated locations for observation, along with their close contacts.

The latest cases bring Shanghai's total to around 90,000 in an outbreak that began last month. No deaths have been ascribed to the outbreak driven by the omicron BA.2 variant, which is much more infectious but also less lethal than the previous delta strain. Two deaths have been reported in another ongoing outbreak in Jilin province in China's northeast.

An official from the EU Chamber of Commerce in China joined a growing chorus of criticism of the Shanghai lockdown, which has disrupted daily life and commerce in a major financial and business center.

"We see a severe shortage of living necessities, particularly fresh vegetables, and citizens are unable to get their deliveries via their apps," said Bettina Schoen-Behanzin, chair of the chamber's Shanghai chapter.

While some residents are receiving food supplies from their district government, she said that "a kind of black market" has developed charging "rocket-high prices" for fruits and vegetables.

"Another really big fear is ending up in one of those mass central quarantine sites," Schoen-Behanzin said in an online event for member companies and journalists.

Others complained earlier about shortages of medical workers, volunteers and beds in the isolation wards. More than 38,000 health workers from 15 provinces have been sent to Shanghai to help with the mass testing and other needs.

Beijing is also tightening measures after 11 cases were detected in the Chinese capital in recent days.

Authorities closed down a shopping and office center in the busy Wangjing district and are requiring those arriving in the city to report to their place of work or residence within 12 hours and undergo a COVID-19 test within 72 hours. They must undergo another test within 48 hours of returning to their place of work.

Despite growing public frustration and concerns about the economic effects, China says it is sticking to its hard-line "zero-tolerance" approach mandating lockdowns, mass testing and the compulsory isolation of all suspected cases and close contacts.

While China's vaccination rate hovers around 90%, its domestically produced inactivated virus vaccines are seen as weaker than the mRNA vaccines such as those produced by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna that are used abroad, as well as in the Chinese territories of Hong Kong and Macao. Vaccination rates among the elderly are also much lower than the population at large, with only around half of those over 80 fully vaccinated.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Sudan anti-coup protesters take to streets
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/sudan-pro-democracy-groups-call-fresh-anti-coup-83904846
GIST	<p>CAIRO -- Thousands of Sudanese marched in the capital of Khartoum and other cities Wednesday in new protests against an October military coup that plunged the African country into political turmoil and aggravated its economic woes.</p> <p>Security forces shot dead at least one person when they violently dispersed protesters, a medical group said.</p>

It was the latest in efforts to pressure the ruling generals, whose takeover has triggered near-daily street protests demanding civilian rule. Called by pro-democracy groups, the demonstrators marched in Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman amid tight security around the presidential palace, which has seen violent clashes in previous protests.

Security forces fired live ammunition and tear gas to disperse protesters in Khartoum and Omdurman, according to the Legitimate Doctors' Union, which is part of the pro-democracy movement. It said one protester died from gunshots in his stomach while taking part in a march in Khartoum.

There were also rallies elsewhere, including in Qadarif and Port Sudan in the east and war-ravaged Darfur region in the west. Footage on social media, which corresponded with The Associated Press reporting, shows young people setting tires on fire and blocking roads.

The army's takeover upended Sudan's transition to democracy after three decades of repression and international isolation under autocratic President Omar al-Bashir. It also sent the country's already fragile economy into free fall, with living conditions rapidly deteriorating. A popular uprising forced the military to remove al-Bashir and his Islamist government in April 2019.

Since the coup, a crackdown on protesters has killed more than 90 people, mostly young men, and injured thousands, according to a Sudanese medical group.

Western governments and world financial institutions suspended their assistance to Sudan in order to pressure the generals to return to civilian-led government.

The U.N. envoy for Sudan warned last month that the country was heading for "an economic and security collapse" unless it addresses the political paralysis following the coup.

Wednesday's marches were called for by the Sudanese Professionals' Association and the so-called Resistance Committees, which were the backbone of the uprising against al-Bashir and have also spearheaded the ongoing anti-coup protests. They demand an immediate handover to a fully civilian government, the removal of the generals behind the coup and holding them accountable in "swift and fair trials."

"Those generals should be prosecuted before revolutionary courts, and the military should return back to its barracks," said Taha Awad, a protest leader with the Resistance Committees in Khartoum.

The generals insist they will hand over power only to an elected government; elections are scheduled for next year.

A rebel alliance, the Sudan Revolutionary Front, allied with the military, offered a roadmap forward in a meeting Tuesday with Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, head of Sudan's ruling sovereign council and the coup leader. The roadmap calls for the generals to release detained protest leaders, end violence against protesters and lift the state of emergency as trust-building measures before engaging in a dialogue about a technocrat Cabinet.

Ossama Said, a spokesman for the rebel alliance, said Burhan welcomed the initiative but did not elaborate.

The U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price on Tuesday urged Sudan's military rulers to allow peaceful protests to "continue without fear of violence."

President Joe Biden's administration last month imposed sanctions on Sudan's Central Reserve Police, which it described as a militarized unit of the country's police forces, for using violence against pro-democracy protests.

	<p>The latest protests come on the third anniversary of the beginning of a sit-in outside the military headquarters in Khartoum that accelerated the removal of al-Bashir.</p> <p>They also come on the 37th anniversary of the overthrow of President Jaafar al-Nimeiri in a bloodless coup in 1985 after a popular uprising. At the time, the military quickly handed power to an elected government.</p> <p>However, the dysfunctional administration lasted only a few years until al-Bashir — a career army officer — forged an alliance with Islamist hard-liners and toppled it in a 1989 coup.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Alarm: China security deal Solomon Islands
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/chinas-security-deal-solomons-raises-alarm-pacific-83923132
GIST	<p>WELLINGTON, New Zealand -- A security alliance between China and the Solomon Islands has sent shudders throughout the South Pacific, with many worried it could set off a large-scale military buildup or that Western animosity to the deal could play into China's hands.</p> <p>What remains most unclear is the extent of China's ambitions.</p> <p>A Chinese military presence in the Solomons would put it not only on the doorstep of Australia and New Zealand but also in close proximity to Guam, with its massive U.S. military bases.</p> <p>China so far operates just one acknowledged foreign military base, in the impoverished but strategically important Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti. Many believe that China's People's Liberation Army is busy establishing an overseas military network, even if they don't use the term "base."</p> <p>The Solomon Islands government says a draft of its agreement with China was initialed last week and will be "cleaned up" and signed soon.</p> <p>The draft, which was leaked online, says that Chinese warships could stop in the Solomons for "logistical replenishment" and that China could send police, military personnel and other armed forces to the Solomons "to assist in maintaining social order."</p> <p>The draft agreement specifies China must approve what information is disclosed about joint security arrangements, including at media briefings.</p> <p>The Solomon Islands, home to about 700,000 people, switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to Beijing in 2019 — a move rejected by the most populous province and a contributing factor to riots last November.</p> <p>U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken responded in February by saying that Washington would reopen its embassy in the capital, Honiara, which has been closed since 1993, to increase its influence in the Solomons before China becomes "strongly embedded."</p> <p>Both China and the Solomons have strongly denied the new pact will lead to the establishment of a Chinese military base. The Solomon Islands government said the pact is necessary because of its limited ability to deal with violent uprisings like the one in November.</p> <p>"The country has been ruined by recurring internal violence for years," the government said this week.</p> <p>But Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. have all expressed alarm about the deal, with New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern describing it as "gravely concerning."</p> <p>David Panuelo, the president of nearby Micronesia, which has close ties to the U.S., wrote an impassioned letter to Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare asking him to rethink the agreement.</p>

He noted that both Micronesia and the Solomon Islands were battlegrounds during World War II, caught up in the clash of great powers.

"I am confident that neither of us wishes to see a conflict of that scope or scale ever again, and most particularly in our own backyards," Panuelo wrote.

But the Solomon Islands police minister mocked Panuelo's concerns on social media, saying he should be more worried about his own atoll being swallowed by the ocean due to climate change.

Sogavare has likewise dismissed foreign criticism of the security agreement as insulting, while labeling those who leaked the draft as "lunatics."

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said the agreement aims to maintain the safety of people's lives and property, and "does not have any military overtones," saying media speculation on the potential development of a base was groundless.

Euan Graham, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies based in Singapore, said China has been pursuing such a port facility for some five years as it aims to expand its naval presence in the South Pacific as part of Beijing's long-game of seeking to become the dominant regional power.

"If they want to break out into the Pacific, at some point they will need the logistics capability to support that presence," Graham said. "We're not talking about war plans here; this is really about extending their presence and influence."

Unlike the base built in Djibouti, where China has commercial interests in the region to protect, Graham said any operation in the Solomon Islands would likely be less substantial.

"It's quite a subtle and interesting geopolitical game that's emerged in the South Pacific," he added. "And I think the Chinese have been very successful, if you like, in outflanking the United States and Australia in an influence competition, not a military competition."

China's base in Djibouti was opened in 2017. China doesn't call it a base, but rather a support facility for its naval operations fending off piracy in the Gulf of Aden and for its African peacekeeping operations. It boasts a 400-meter (1,300-foot) runway and a pier big enough to dock either of China's two operating aircraft carriers.

The base, with 2,000 personnel, allows China to position supplies, troops and equipment in a strategically crucial region, while also keeping an eye on U.S. forces that are stationed nearby.

Chief among other potential base candidates is Cambodia, whose authoritarian leader Hun Sen has long been a trusted Chinese ally and which reportedly signed a secret 2019 agreement permitting the establishment of a Chinese base.

China is dredging the harbor at Ream Naval Base to allow ships larger than any Cambodia possesses to dock, and is building new infrastructure to replace a U.S.-built naval tactical headquarters. A Chinese base in Cambodia would establish a chokepoint in the Gulf of Thailand close to the crucial Malacca Strait.

China has also funded projects at Gwadar in Pakistan, another close ally, and in Sri Lanka, where Chinese infrastructure lending has forced the government to hand over control of the southern port of Hambantota.

Especially intriguing has been an alleged Chinese push to establish a base in the West African nation of Equatorial Guinea. That would give China a presence on the Atlantic opposite the east coast of the continental United States as well as in an important African oil-producing region.

“China has seized opportunities to expand its influence at a time when the U.S. and other countries have not been as engaged economically in the Pacific islands,” said Elizabeth Wishnick, an expert on Chinese foreign policy at Montclair State University in New Jersey.

About 80 years ago in the Solomon Islands, the U.S. military began its famous “island hopping” campaign of World War II to take back Pacific islands from Imperial Japanese forces one-by-one. It successfully won back the main island of Guadalcanal in February 1943 after some six months of fierce fighting.

Today, the Solomon Islands would give China the potential ability to interfere with U.S. naval operations in the region that could be crucial in the event of a conflict over Taiwan or in the South and East China seas.

Lt. Gen. Greg Bilton, Australia’s chief of joint operations, said that if Chinese naval ships were able to operate from the Solomon Islands it would “change the calculus.”

“They’re in much closer proximity to the Australian mainland, obviously, and that would change the way that we would undertake day-to-day operations, particularly in the air and at sea,” he told reporters.

But Jonathan Pryke, the director of the Pacific Islands Program at the Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank, said he thinks that leaders have overreacted to the agreement, perhaps in Australia's case because there is an election looming.

“It's clearly getting everyone very animated in the West and very alarmed,” Pryke said. “But I don't think it markedly changes things on the ground.”

He said the pact could be seen as the first step toward China establishing a base, but there would need to be many more steps taken before that could happen.

“I think the alarmism has strengthened China's hand by pushing the Solomon Islands into a corner,” Pryke said. “And they've reacted the way I imagine many countries would react from getting this outside pressure — by pushing back, and digging their heels in.”

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HEADLINE	04/06 Major power outage hits Puerto Rico
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/puerto-rico-plunged-darkness-power-station-fire-83924315
GIST	<p>SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico -- A major power outage hit Puerto Rico late Wednesday, plunging hundreds of thousands of customers into darkness after a fire erupted at one of the largest power plants in the U.S. territory.</p> <p>The outage was one of the biggest in recent months for the island's crumbling electrical grid, which has seen its periodic blackouts grow worse the last few years. The outage elicited a collective groan across the island of 3.2 million people, with many who depend on insulin or respiratory therapies once again worried about how long it would last.</p> <p>“Apagón!” wrote many frustrated customers across social media, using the Spanish word for outage.</p> <p>Luma, a private company that took over transmission and distribution of Puerto Rico’s Electric Power Authority last year, called it an island-wide power outage. However, the state power company's website said nearly 350,000 clients out of nearly 1.5 million were without lights.</p> <p>Gov. Pedro Pierluisi said priority would be given to hospitals and other institutions as he tweeted: “I urge everyone to remain calm.”</p> <p>Puerto Rico’s health secretary said generators at all hospitals and health centers were functioning and had enough fuel, adding that coronavirus vaccines remained properly stored at the correct temperature.</p>

Transportation officials said crews evacuated passengers from the island's rapid transit system and took them to their destinations via buses. Meanwhile, long lines formed at some gas stations as those with generators sought to refill them.

Education officials said they would soon announce whether classes at public schools would be cancelled Thursday, frustrating many parents who worried they might not find out if their cellphones died and they were unable to charge them.

Luma said in a statement that power might not be restored until Thursday, "given the size and scope" of the outage.

"The power grid has suffered a massive island-wide blackout, potentially caused by a circuit breaker failure at the Costa Sur generation plant. We are not clear on the exact cause at this time," the company said.

Costa Sur is one of the island's four main power plants.

Puerto Rico's fire department worked late into the night to put out the blaze as frustration and anger over yet another blackout continued to grow.

Carian Montull, 36, said she was at a clothing store in southern Puerto Rico when the lights went out. She said the store's generators failed to turn on, so she and about a dozen other customers were forced to leave their purchases behind and go home.

She said someone nearby cried out: "The lights seriously went out?! It can't be."

Montull said she doesn't have a generator at home and hoped the power would come back soon so the food in her refrigerator wouldn't spoil.

Luma said it would release additional information once it had more details. When it took over transmission and distribution in June, the governor at the time said the company had pledged to reduce power interruptions by 30% and the length of outages by 40%. That same month, a large fire at a substation in the capital of San Juan left hundreds of thousands without power.

Another fire at a power plant in September 2016 sparked an island-wide blackout. A year later, Hurricane Maria hit, razing the island's frail electrical grid and leaving some customers without power for nearly a year. Emergency repairs have since been made, but reconstruction efforts have yet to start.

In addition, Puerto Rico's Electric Power Authority is trying to emerge from bankruptcy and holds some \$9 billion in public debt that it is trying to restructure. The utility has long struggled with mismanagement, corruption and aging infrastructure that has not been maintained.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Ukraine braces for eastern front offensive
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukraine-girds-renewed-russian-offensive-eastern-front-83925535
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Ukraine braced for a climactic battle for control of the besieged country's industrial east after Russian forces withdrew from the shattered outskirts of Kyiv to regroup and intensify their offensive across the Donbas region, where authorities urged people to evacuate before time runs out.</p> <p>The mayor of the southern port city of Mariupol said Wednesday that more than 5,000 civilians had been killed there. Meanwhile, in areas north of the capital, Ukrainian officials gathered evidence of Russian atrocities amid signs Moscow's troops killed people indiscriminately before retreating over the past several days.</p>

In his nightly address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that the Russian military is building up its forces for a new offensive in the east, where the Kremlin has said its goal is to “liberate” the Donbas, Ukraine’s mostly Russian-speaking industrial heartland. Ukraine, too, was preparing for battle, he said.

“We will fight and we will not retreat,” he said. “We will seek all possible options to defend ourselves until Russia begins to seriously seek peace. This is our land. This is our future. And we won’t give them up.”

Ukrainian authorities urged people living in the Donbas to evacuate immediately.

“Later, people will come under fire,” Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said, “and we won’t be able to do anything to help them.”

A U.S. defense official speaking on condition of anonymity said Russia had completed pulling out all of its estimated 24,000 or more troops from the Kyiv and Chernihiv areas in the north, sending them into Belarus or Russia to resupply and reorganize, probably to return to fight in the east.

But a Western official, also speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence estimates, said it will take Russia’s battle-damaged forces as much as a month to regroup for a major push on eastern Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the U.S. and its Western allies have moved to impose new sanctions against the Kremlin over killings they labeled as war crimes.

Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boichenko said that of the more than 5,000 civilians killed during weeks of Russian bombardment and street fighting, 210 were children. Russian forces bombed hospitals, including one where 50 people burned to death, he said.

Boichenko said more than 90% of the city’s infrastructure was destroyed. The attacks on the strategic city on the Sea of Azov have cut off food, water, fuel and medicine and pulverized homes and businesses.

British defense officials said 160,000 people remained trapped in the city, which had a prewar population of 430,000. A humanitarian relief convoy accompanied by the Red Cross has been trying for days without success to get into the city.

Capturing Mariupol would allow Russia to secure a continuous land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow seized from Ukraine in 2014.

In the north, Ukrainian authorities said the bodies of least 410 civilians have been found in towns around Kyiv, victims of what Zelenskyy has portrayed as a Russian campaign of murder, rape, dismemberment and torture. Some victims had apparently been shot at close range. Some were found with their hands bound.

In his address Wednesday night, Zelenskyy accused Russia of interfering with an international investigation into possible war crimes by removing corpses and trying to hide other evidence in Bucha, northwest of Kyiv.

“We have information that the Russian troops have changed tactics and are trying to remove the dead people, the dead Ukrainians, from the streets and cellars of territory they occupied,” he said. “This is only an attempt to hide the evidence and nothing more.”

Switching from Ukrainian to Russian, Zelenskyy urged ordinary Russians “to somehow confront the Russian repressive machine” instead of being “equated with the Nazis for the rest of your life.”

He called on Russians to demand an end to the war, “if you have even a little shame about what the Russian military is doing in Ukraine.”

In reaction to the alleged atrocities outside Kyiv, the U.S. announced sanctions against Putin's two adult daughters and said it is toughening penalties against Russian banks. Britain banned investment in Russia and pledged to end its dependence on Russian coal and oil by the end of the year.

The U.S. Senate planned to take up legislation Thursday to end normal trade relations with Russia and to codify President Joe Biden’s executive action banning imports of Russian oil. The trade suspension would allow Biden to enact higher tariffs on certain Russian imports.

The European Union is also expected to take additional punitive measures, including an embargo on coal.

The Kremlin has insisted its troops have committed no war crimes and alleged the images out of Bucha were staged by the Ukrainians.

More bodies were yet to be collected in Bucha. The Associated Press saw two in a house in a silent neighborhood. From time to time there was the muffled boom of workers clearing the town of mines and other unexploded ordnance.

Workers at a cemetery began to load more than 60 bodies into a grocery shipping truck for transport to a facility for further investigation.

Police said they found at least 20 bodies in the Makariv area west of Kyiv. In the village of Andriivka, residents said the Russians arrived in early March and took locals’ phones. Some people were detained, then released. Others met unknown fates. Some described sheltering for weeks in cellars normally used for storing vegetables.

“First we were scared, now we are hysterical,” said Valentyna Klymenko, 64. She said she, her husband and two neighbors weathered the siege by sleeping on stacks of potatoes covered with a mattress and blankets. “We didn’t cry at first. Now we are crying.”

To the north of the village, in the town of Borodyanka, rescue workers searched through the rubble of apartment blocks, looking for bodies.

Thwarted in their efforts to swiftly take the capital, increasing numbers of Putin’s troops, along with mercenaries, have been reported moving into the Donbas.

Ukrainian forces have been fighting Russia-backed separatists in the Donbas since 2014. Ahead of its Feb. 24 invasion, Moscow recognized the Luhansk and Donetsk regions as independent states.

The United States and the United Kingdom boycotted an informal meeting Wednesday of the U.N. Security Council called by Russia to press its baseless claims that the U.S. has biological warfare laboratories in Ukraine. The meeting was the latest of several moves by Russia that have led Western countries to accuse Moscow of using the U.N. as a platform for disinformation to divert attention from the war.

Russia's allegations have previously been debunked. Ukraine does own and operate a network of biological labs that have received funding and research support from the U.S. and are not a secret. The labs are part of a program that aims to reduce the likelihood of deadly outbreaks, whether natural or manufactured.

The U.S. efforts date to work in the 1990s to dismantle the former Soviet Union’s program for weapons of mass destruction.

HEADLINE	04/06 Thailand sends Myanmar refugees back
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/risk-death-thailand-sends-myanmar-refugees-back-83925699
GIST	<p>JAKARTA, Indonesia -- The young woman from Myanmar and her family now live amid the tall grasses of a riverbank on the Thai border, trapped in limbo between a country that does not want them and a country whose military could kill them.</p> <p>Like thousands of others fleeing mounting violence after a military takeover in Myanmar last February, Hay left her village for neighboring Thailand in search of a safe haven that does not exist. Returning to Myanmar would place her and her family at risk of death. And yet that is precisely what Thai authorities — wary of jeopardizing their relationship with Myanmar’s ruling military — tell them to do at least once a week, she says.</p> <p>“When they told us to go back, we cried and explained why we can’t go back home,” says Hay, who lives in a flimsy tent on the Moei River, which divides the two countries. The Associated Press is withholding Hay’s full name, along with the full names of other refugees in this story, to protect them from retaliation by authorities. “Sometimes we cross back to the Myanmar side of the river. But I have not returned to the village at all.”</p> <p>Though international refugee laws forbid the return of people to countries where their lives may be in danger, Thailand has nonetheless sent thousands of people who fled escalating violence by Myanmar’s military back home, according to interviews with refugees, aid groups and Thai authorities themselves. That has forced Hay and other Myanmar refugees to ricochet between both sides of the river as the fighting in their home villages rages and briefly recedes.</p> <p>“It is this game of ping-pong,” says Sally Thompson, executive director of The Border Consortium, which has long been the main provider of food, shelter and other support to Myanmar refugees in Thailand. “You can’t keep going back and forth across the border. You’ve got to be somewhere where it’s stable.....And there is absolutely no stability in Myanmar at the moment.”</p> <p>Since its takeover last year, Myanmar’s military has killed more than 1,700 people, arrested more than 13,000 and systematically tortured children, women and men.</p> <p>Thailand, which is not a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention, insists Myanmar’s refugees return to their embattled homeland voluntarily. Thailand also insists it has complied with all international non-refoulement laws, which dictate that people must not be returned to a country where they would face torture, punishment or harm.</p> <p>“As the situation on the Myanmar side of the border improved, the Thai authorities facilitated their voluntary return to the Myanmar side,” says Thailand Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Tanee Sangrat. “Thailand remains committed and will continue to uphold its long-held humanitarian tradition, including the principle of non-refoulement, in assisting those in need.”</p> <p>Somchai Kitcharoenrungrroj, governor of Thailand’s Tak province, where thousands of people from Myanmar have sought refuge, said many crossed illegally when there was no fighting.</p> <p>“We had to send them back as the laws said,” Somchai says. “When they faced the threats and crossed here, we never refused to help them. We provided them all basic needs according to the international human rights principle.”</p> <p>“For example,” he added, “last week we also found some crossing here illegally and we sent them back.”</p> <p>More than half a million people have been displaced inside Myanmar and 48,000 have fled to neighboring countries since the military’s takeover, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. The UNHCR says Thai government sources estimate around 17,000 Myanmar refugees have sought safety in Thailand since the takeover. But only around 2,000 are currently living on the Thai side of the border, according to the Thai-Myanmar Border Command Center.</p>

“UNHCR continues to strongly advocate that refugees fleeing conflict, generalized violence and persecution in Myanmar should not be forcibly returned to a place where their lives and freedoms could be in danger,” the agency said.

Most of those fleeing clashes between the military and ethnic minority armed groups along the border must wade across the rivers dividing the two countries, belongings and babies balanced atop their shoulders. Those who reach Thailand are not allowed to settle in the decades-old refugee camps that dot the region and house 90,000 people who left Myanmar years before the takeover.

Instead, they have been relegated to crowded cattle sheds or rickety tents made of tarpaulin and bamboo. The moment there is a pause in fighting, refugees and aid groups say, Thai authorities send them back, despite Myanmar’s military taking over villages, burning homes and setting land mines.

“I have seen some of them being forced to get in a car, get off at the river, and cross over to the other side,” says Phoe Thingyan, secretary of Thai aid group the Overseas Irrawaddy Association.

In Myanmar’s border regions, ethnic minority armed groups have been fighting the central government for decades in a bid for greater autonomy, with more clashes after the military takeover. Despite some pauses, witnesses along the Thai border say the fighting there is now the worst it’s been in decades. At times, the gunfire, bombing and fighter jets have been audible from Thailand, and even houses on the Thai side of the river shake with the blasts.

Life along the river is grim and frightening.

“It is not far from the war zone,” says Naw Htoo Htoo, of the ethnic Karen Human Rights Group. “The elderly and children are not comfortable in the makeshift tents....There are illnesses not only caused by the weather, but also by COVID-19.”

In December, 48-year-old Myint fled the Karen small town of Lay Kay Kaw, near the Thai border, with her husband and three children. Officials in Thailand sent them back. With few options, Myint and her family joined around 600 others living near the river on the Myanmar side.

In February, heavy rains flooded their camp, and Myint fears the looming monsoon season will make their already miserable situation even worse.

“I think the refugee camps will be in a lot of trouble,” she says. “We can do nothing but make our temporary tents a little stronger.”

On the Thai side of the river, Hay’s tent offers virtually no protection from the sweltering sun, mosquitoes and drenching rains.

The family yearns for their home and their corn fields near Lay Kay Kaw. On Dec. 16, Hay and her husband grabbed their 3-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son and ran amid a cacophony of gunfire. When they reached the river, the fighting was still so close they knew they could not safely stay on the Myanmar side. And so they trudged through the water to Thailand.

“We want to go back but we have no house,” she says.

There are no toilets, and no way to make money. Food and other supplies are scarce, yet the Thai authorities have refused to allow international NGOs and the UNHCR access to the refugees.

“The Thai authorities have said that they have resources to respond, and the INGOs and the UN will not get access,” says Thompson of The Border Consortium. “The Thai authorities are very much keeping this a low visibility, very basic response.”

Most of the aid has come from local Thai community groups. Phoe Thingyan, of the Overseas Irrawaddy Association, says his group sends 1,000 boxes of rice each morning and evening to the refugees, but that he has had to ask the Thai military for permission to accept donations.

The Thai military doesn't even want to acknowledge the existence of Myanmar refugees in Thailand because that alone could upset Myanmar's military leaders, says Patrick Phongsathorn, human rights specialist with the Asia-based group Fortify Rights.

"The Thai military is intent on controlling the situation, controlling the narrative, because obviously they have political skin in the game, in what's happening in Myanmar," he says. "They are very close with the Myanmar junta authorities."

Somchai, the Thai governor, seemed to hint at this: "When the fighting stopped, they had to go back," he said of the refugees Thailand returned. "Otherwise, it could be a sensitive issue for the relationship between both countries."

The Thai military declined to comment.

Those who remain in Thailand end up in not just physical but legal limbo, vulnerable to exploitation. One Myanmar refugee in Thailand who spoke to the AP said "police cards" – unofficial documents that allow displaced people to avoid arrest or deportation -- are purchased monthly through middlemen for an average cost of 350 Thai baht (\$10). Cards are marked with a photo or symbol showing that the holders have paid the latest monthly bribe.

Without the cards, refugees risk further harassment or possible arrest by Thai authorities.

"They will take you to the police station and they will check your documents, test your urine for drug use," says the refugee, whose name is being withheld by the AP for security reasons. "Police intimidate the people, and the cards are the easiest way to avoid that."

Tanee, the Foreign Affairs spokesperson, said the government "categorically denied" the existence of any extortion or bribery.

Though 23-year-old Win and his family initially pitched their tent on the Thai side of the river, Thai authorities soon sent them back. The chemistry student now regularly crosses the river through chest-deep water to retrieve food, clothes and other donated items from the Thai side. Then he turns around and wades back to his campsite in Myanmar, where he lives alongside around 300 other refugees, including children and the elderly.

They are surviving, but only just. What he wants more than anything, he says, is the one thing he cannot have.

"I just want to go home," he says. "I do not want anything else."

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HEADLINE	04/06 Ukraine refugees' route to US thru Mexico
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukrainian-refugees-find-route-us-mexico-83925616
GIST	<p>TIJUANA, Mexico -- Hundreds of Ukrainian refugees arriving daily have a message for family and friends in Europe: the fastest route to settle in the United States is booking a flight to Mexico.</p> <p>A loose volunteer coalition, largely from Slavic churches in the western United States, is guiding hundreds of refugees daily from the airport in the Mexican border city of Tijuana to hotels, churches and shelters, where they wait two to four days for U.S. officials to admit them on humanitarian parole. In less than two weeks, volunteers worked with U.S. and Mexican officials to build a remarkably efficient and expanding network to provide food, security, transportation, and shelter.</p>

The volunteers, who wear blue and yellow badges to represent the Ukrainian flag but have no group name or leader, started a waiting list on notepads and later switched to a mobile app normally used to track church attendance. Ukrainians are told to report to a U.S. border crossing as their numbers approach, a system that organizers liken to waiting for a restaurant table.

“We feel so lucky, so blessed,” said Tatiana Bondarenko, who traveled through Moldova, Romania, Austria and Mexico before arriving Tuesday in San Diego with her husband and children, ages 8, 12, and 15. Her final destination was Sacramento, California, to live with her mother, who she hadn’t seen in 15 years.

Another Ukrainian family posed nearby for photos under a U.S. Customs and Border Protection sign at San Diego’s San Ysidro port of entry, the busiest crossing between the U.S. and Mexico. Volunteers under a blue canopy offered snacks while refugees waited for family to pick them up or for buses to take them to a nearby church.

At the Tijuana airport, weary travelers who enter Mexico as tourists in Mexico City or Cancun are directed to a makeshift lounge in the terminal with a sign in black marker that reads, “Only for Ukrainian Refugees.” It is the only place to register to enter the U.S.

About 200 to 300 Ukrainians were being admitted daily at the San Ysidro crossing this week, with hundreds more arriving in Tijuana, according to volunteers who manage the waiting list. There were 973 families or single adults waiting on Tuesday.

U.S. officials told volunteers they aim to admit about 550 Ukrainians daily as processing moves to a nearby crossing that is temporarily closed to the public. CBP didn’t provide numbers in response to questions about operations and plans, saying only that it has expanded facilities in San Diego to deal with humanitarian cases.

“We realized we had a problem that the government wasn’t going to solve, so we solved it,” said Phil Metzger, pastor of Calvary Church in the San Diego suburb of Chula Vista, where about 75 members host Ukrainian families and another 100 refugees sleep on air mattresses and pews.

Metzger, whose pastoral work has taken him to Ukraine and Hungary, calls the operation “duct tape and glue” but refugees prefer it to overwhelmed European countries, where millions of Ukrainians have settled.

The Biden administration has said it will accept up to 100,000 Ukrainians but Mexico is the only route producing big numbers. Appointments at U.S. consulates in Europe are scarce, and refugee resettlement takes time.

The administration set a refugee resettlement cap of 125,000 in the 12-month period that ends Sept. 30 but accepted only 8,758 by March 31, including 704 Ukrainians. In the previous year, it capped refugee resettlement at 62,500 but took only 11,411, including 803 Ukrainians.

The administration paroled more than 76,000 Afghans through U.S. airports in response to the departure of American troops last year, but nothing similar is afoot for Ukrainians.

Oksana Dugnyk, 36, hesitated to leave her home in Bucha but acquiesced to her husband’s wishes before Russian troops invaded the town and left behind streets strewn with corpses. The couple worried about violence in Mexico with three young children but the robust presence of volunteers in Tijuana reassured them and a friend in Ohio agreed to host them.

“So far, so good,” Dugnyk said a day after arriving at a Tijuana gymnasium that the city government opened for about 400 Ukrainians to sleep on a basketball court. “We have food. We have a place to stay. We hope everything will be fine.”

Alerted by text message or social media, Ukrainians are summoned to a grassy hill and bus shelter near the border crossing hours before their numbers are called. The city government opened the bus shelter to protect Ukrainians from torrential rain.

Angelina Mykyta, a college student in Kyiv, acknowledged nerves as her number neared. She fled to Warsaw after the invasion but decided to take a chance on the United States because she wanted to settle with a pastor she knows in Kalispell, Montana.

"I think we'll be OK," she said while waiting to be escorted from the camp of hundreds of Ukrainians to their final stop in Mexico — a small area with a few dozen folding chairs within earshot of U.S. officials. Some refuse to drink at the final stop, fearing they will have to go to the bathroom and miss their turn.

Lulls end when CBP officers approach: "We need a family." "Give me three more." "Singles, we need singles." A volunteer ensures orderly movement.

The arrival of Ukrainians comes as the Biden administration prepares for much larger numbers when pandemic-related asylum limits for all nationalities end May 23. Since March 2020, the U.S. has used Title 42 authority, named for a 1944 public health law, to suspend rights to seek asylum under U.S. law and international treaty.

Metzger, the Chula Vista pastor, said his church cannot long continue its 24-hour-a-day pace helping refugees, and suspects U.S. authorities will not adopt what volunteers have done.

"If you make something go smooth, then everybody's going to come," he said. "We're making it so easy. Eventually I'm sure they'll say, 'No, we're done.'"

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HEADLINE	04/06 Avian flu spreads in North America
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/zoos-hiding-birds-avian-flu-spreads-north-america-83894329
GIST	<p>OMAHA, Neb. -- Zoos across North America are moving their birds indoors and away from people and wildlife as they try to protect them from the highly contagious and potentially deadly avian influenza.</p> <p>Penguins may be the only birds visitors to many zoos can see right now, because they already are kept inside and usually protected behind glass in their exhibits, making it harder for the bird flu to reach them.</p> <p>Nearly 23 million chickens and turkeys have already been killed across the United States to limit the spread of the virus, and zoos are working hard to prevent any of their birds from meeting the same fate. It would be especially upsetting for zoos to have to kill any of the endangered or threatened species in their care.</p> <p>"It would be extremely devastating," said Maria Franke, who is the manager of welfare science at Toronto Zoo, which has less than two dozen Loggerhead Shrike songbirds that it's breeding with the hope of reintroducing them into the wild. "We take amazing care and the welfare and well being of our animals is the utmost importance. There's a lot of staff that has close connections with the animals that they care for here at the zoo."</p> <p>Toronto Zoo workers are adding roofs to some outdoor bird exhibits and double-checking the mesh surrounding enclosures to ensure it will keep wild birds out.</p> <p>Birds shed the virus through their droppings and nasal discharge. Experts say it can be spread through contaminated equipment, clothing, boots and vehicles carrying supplies. Research has shown that small birds that squeeze into zoo exhibits or buildings can also spread the flu, and that mice can even track it inside.</p>

So far, no outbreaks have been reported at zoos, but there have been wild birds found dead that had the flu. For example, a wild duck that died in a behind-the-scenes area of the Blank Park Zoo in Des Moines, Iowa, after tornadoes last month tested positive, zoo spokesman Ryan Bickel said.

Most of the steps zoos are taking are designed to prevent contact between wild birds and zoo animals. In some places, officials are requiring employees to change into clean boots and don protective gear before entering bird areas.

When bird flu cases are found in poultry, officials order the entire flock to be killed because the virus is so contagious. However, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has indicated that zoos might be able to avoid that by isolating infected birds and possibly euthanizing a small number of them.

Sarah Woodhouse, director of animal health at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium, said she is optimistic after talking with state and federal regulators.

"They all agree that ordering us to depopulate a large part of our collection would be the absolute last-ditch effort. So they're really interested in working with us to see what we can do to make sure that we're not going to spread the disease while also being able to take care of our birds and not have to euthanize," Woodhouse said.

Among the precautions zoos are taking is to keep birds in smaller groups so that if a case is found, only a few would be affected. The USDA and state veterinarians would make the final decision about which birds had to be killed.

"Euthanasia is really the only way to keep it from spreading," said Luis Padilla, who is vice president of animal collections at the Saint Louis Zoo. "That's why we have so many of these very proactive measures in place."

The National Aviary in Pittsburgh — the nation's largest — is providing individual health checks for each of its roughly 500 birds. Many already live in large glass enclosures or outdoor habitats where they don't have direct exposure to wildlife, said Dr. Pilar Fish, the aviary's senior director of veterinary medicine and zoological advancement.

Kansas City Zoo CEO Sean Putney said he's heard a few complaints from visitors, but most people seem OK with not getting to see some birds. "I think our guests understand that we have what's in the best interests of the animals in mind when we make these decisions even though they can't get to see them," Putney said.

Officials emphasize that bird flu doesn't jeopardize the safety of meat or eggs or represent a significant risk to human health. No infected birds are allowed into the food supply, and properly cooking poultry and eggs kills bacteria and viruses. No human cases have been found in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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HEADLINE	04/06 US sanctions Putin's adult daughters
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-targets-putins-adult-daughters-round-russian-sanctions/story?id=83908763
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin's two adult daughters -- Katerina Vladimirovna Tikhonova and Maria Vladimirovna Vorontsova -- are included in the latest round of sanctions on Russia the U.S. announced on Wednesday.</p> <p>Before delivering unrelated remarks to the North America's Building Trades Unions Legislative Conference, President Joe Biden took to the bully pulpit to announce the new sanctions on Wednesday afternoon and to denounce the atrocities witnessed in Bucha, a suburb of Ukraine's capital city Kyiv.</p>

"Bodies left in streets as Russian troops withdraw. Some shot in the back of head with hands tied behind their backs. Civilians executed in cold blood. Bodies dumped into mass graves. A sense of brutality and humanity left for all the world to see unapologetically," Biden said.

"There's nothing less happening than major war crimes. Responsible nations have to come together to hold these perpetrators accountable. And together with our allies and our partners, we're going to keep raising economic costs, and ratchet up the pain for Putin and further increased Russia's economic isolation," he continued.

The new round of sanctions includes a ban on all new investments in Russia, increased sanctions on two major financial institutions in Russia -- Sberbank and Alfa-Bank -- as well as on major Russian state-owned enterprises, and sanctions on Russian government officials and their family members -- including Putin's daughters.

"We, along with our European allies, are adding the names to the list of Russian elites and families we are sanctioning," Biden added -- but not calling out Putin's daughters by name. "Look, these oligarchs and their family members are not allowed to hold on to their wealth in Europe or the United States and keep the yachts worth hundreds of millions of dollars, luxury vacation homes, while children in Ukraine are being killed, displaced from their homes every single day."

According to the White House, the U.S. has sanctioned Putin's two adult daughters, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's wife and daughter, as well as the remaining members of Russia's National Security Council that weren't already hit with full blocking sanctions, including former president and Prime Minister of Russia Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin.

While Putin for years has closely guarded his daughters' privacy, the U.S. Treasury Department said Wednesday that Tikhonova is a tech executive whose work supports the Russian government and defense industry, while Vorontsova leads state-funded genetics research programs that Treasury says the Kremlin has given billions of dollars, with personal oversight by Putin.

A senior administration official said on an earlier call with reporters that the U.S. has reason to believe that Putin and his cronies hide their wealth with family members, and said, "We believe that many of Putin's assets are hidden, with family members and that's why we're targeting them."

"These individuals have enriched themselves at the expense of the Russian people. Some of them are responsible for providing the support necessary to underpin Putin's war on Ukraine. This action cuts them off from the U.S. financial system and freezes any assets they hold in the United States," the White House said in a fact sheet announcing the sanctions.

Since Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine in late February, the U.S. has sanctioned more than 140 oligarchs and their family members and more than 400 Russian government officials and has now fully blocked more than two-thirds of the Russian banking sector, which held about \$1.4 trillion in assets before the war.

In conjunction with the G-7 and European Union, the U.S. also announced Wednesday it was cutting off Russia's ability to use its previously frozen central bank funds to make debt payments -- forcing it to find other sources of dollars to avoid defaulting.

In his remarks Wednesday, Biden also applauded corporate America for "stepping up for a change" and choosing to leave the Russian market on their own accord.

"Russia will very likely lose its status as a major economy, and it will continue a long descent into economic, financial, and technological isolation," a senior administration official told reporters.

According to the White House, under the new sanctions, Russia's GDP will contract up to 15% this year, wiping out the last 15 years of economic gains. Inflation, already spiking above 15%, is expected to rise,

and supply chains will be further disrupted as more than 600 private sector companies have already left the Russian market.

"At this rate, it will go back to Soviet-style living standards from the 1980s," the official added.

Asked if the U.S. was concerned about any downsides to detaching Russia from the global market to the point where it would become more concerned with disrupting it, rather than getting back in, the official seemingly brushed off the concern, saying that the U.S. was using a "negative feedback loop" to deter Putin, but that can be stopped if Putin also stops.

"None of this is permanent. The only aspect that's permanent of the lives that he's taken away, and he can never bring those back. But the sanctions, the sanctions are designed to be able to respond to the conditions on the ground, and to create leverage for the outcome we seek," the official said.

The announcement follows Biden on Monday saying he was seeking further sanctions in response to apparent war crimes in Bucha -- but as national security adviser Jake Sullivan warned this week, the White House acknowledges that further sanctions against Russia will not change Putin's behavior overnight.

"Sanctions are intended to impose costs so Russia can't carry on these grotesque acts without paying a severe price for it," Sullivan said during Monday's briefing.

"We don't expect that that shift in behavior will be caused by sanctions overnight or in a week. It will take time to grind down the elements of Russian power within the Russian economy, to hit their industrial base hard, to hit the sources of revenue that have propped up this war and propped up the kleptocracy in Russia," he added.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	04/06 Govt. agencies use humor on social media
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3424125/government-agencies-funny-social-media-accounts/
GIST	<p>When you think of the TSA, the Seattle Police Department, and various branches of government, you don't generally think of fun. But historically serious organizations like these are attempting to connect with the public through humor on social media.</p> <p>"Someone had tweeted at us and said, 'Who let New Jersey have a Twitter account?' " said Megan Coyne, social media director for the Office of Governor Phil Murphy in New Jersey. "And I was like, 'That's so rude. We have to respond to it.'"</p> <p>So Coyne and her colleague responded professionally and maturely with a simple, "Your mom."</p> <p>"Which is a classic middle school insult, but it's hilarious," said Coyne. "It blew up. It got about 500,000 likes, it got us 100,000 followers in one weekend. After that there was no turning back."</p> <p>In 2013, the Seattle Police Department was looking to build up its own social media presence.</p> <p>"I had been a cops reporter for awhile," said Jonah Spangenthal-Lee, former writer for The Stranger and Publicola and current SPD public affairs officer. "SPD kind of said, 'Hey, we have this sandbox. Do you want to come play in it? Because we don't really know what to do with it.'"</p> <p>Through SPD's handle, Spangenthal-Lee tweeted wry jokes about Hempfest and the Seahawks, and replied to uptight tweets with levity to deflate a situation, like this exchange:</p> <p>SPD tweets like this earned compliments from followers like:</p>

A+ trolling Seattle PD, SPD has a sense of humor! and I love this so hard!

“People don’t interact with their police departments unless they’re having a really bad day,” Spangenthal-Lee said. “There needed to be a way people could ask questions or find out about resources. We were trying to be approachable and also pointing to some of the bizarre things that happen everyday in a city. Not necessarily poking fun at a situation, but just highlighting, like, hey this thing happened in this way and it’s truly bizarre.”

The TSA’s social media manager, Janis Burl, and her team use [puns and jokes](#) to get important messages across to their one million [Instagram followers](#).

“The purpose of shifting the account is to increase engagement,” said Burl. “Our theory is if we can engage with the public and have fun and still get out our message, then if something bad really happens and we need to get a message out to the public, people will be listening.”

Coyne, Burl, and Spangenthal-Lee all say balance is key. You want to make it fun, but stay credible.

“A great example is the coronavirus,” said Coyne. “For the last two years, that @NJGov account has been used to get important, life saving information out to people. But we’ve also infused our own tone into it and embraced New Jersey humor. When there was a big emphasis on staying six feet apart, we used New Jersey things as measurements, like ‘Stay one Bruce Springsteen apart’ or ‘Stay one Bon Jovi apart.’”

SPD was one of the first in the country to try this lighter social media tactic, but the fun and games have since quieted down. A quick scroll through its Twitter page reveals nothing but shootings, homicides, stolen items, and missing person reports. I asked Spangenthal-Lee what changed and he let out a big sigh.

“There are a lot of factors there,” said Spangenthal-Lee. “Things in the department are very different from when I started. I know it wasn’t entirely popular, internally. There were some folks with very loud voices who had a lot to say about it and didn’t think it was appropriate or didn’t like the way it reflected on officers. It was something that was very popular externally but some [internal] people complained about it enough times that you can only keep that up for so long.”

But the T.S.A. continues to post funny photos and punny captions relevant to pop culture and trending stories. Burl says you have to reach people how they like to be reached, and today that is through social media.

“[We want to] let them know that, yes, we might be the government but we’re people too,” said Burl. “From my personal perspective, America has loosened up a bit.”

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HEADLINE	04/06 Ukraine defends itself against cyberattacks
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220406-how-ukraine-has-defended-itself-against-cyberattacks-lessons-for-the-u-s
GIST	<p>In 2014, as Russia launched a proxy war in Eastern Ukraine and annexed Crimea, and in the years that followed, Russian hackers hammered Ukraine. The cyberattacks went so far as to knock out the power grid in parts of the country in 2015. Russian hackers stepped up their efforts against Ukraine in the run-up to the 2022 invasion, but with notably different results. Those differences hold lessons for U.S. national cyber defense.</p> <p>I’m a cybersecurity researcher with a background as a political officer in the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and working as an analyst in countries of the former Soviet Union. Over the last year, I led a USAID-funded program in which Florida International University and Purdue University instructors trained more than 125 Ukrainian university cybersecurity faculty and more than 700 cybersecurity students. Many of the faculty are leading advisors to the government or consult with critical infrastructure organizations on</p>

cybersecurity. The program emphasized practical skills in using leading cybersecurity tools to defend simulated enterprise networks against real malware and other cybersecurity threats.

The invasion took place just weeks before the national cybersecurity competition was to be held for students from the program's 14 participating universities. I believe that the training that the faculty and students received in protecting critical infrastructure helped reduce the impact of Russian cyberattacks. The most obvious sign of this resilience is the success Ukraine has had in [keeping its internet on](#) despite Russian [bombs](#), sabotage and [cyberattacks](#).

What This Means for the U.S.

On March 21, 2022, U.S. [President Joe Biden warned](#) the American public that Russia's capability to launch cyberattacks is "fairly consequential and it's coming." As Deputy National Security Adviser Anne Neuberger explained, Biden's warning was a call to prepare U.S. cyber defenses.

The concern in the White House over cyberattacks is shared by [cybersecurity practitioners](#). The Ukrainian experience with Russian cyberattacks provides lessons for how institutions ranging from electric power plants to public schools can contribute to strengthening a nation's cyber defenses.

National cyber defense starts with governments and organizations [evaluating risks](#) and increasing their capacity to meet the latest cybersecurity threats. After President Biden's warning, Neuberger [recommended that organizations take five steps](#): adopt multifactor password authentication, keep software patches up-to-date, back up data, run drills and cooperate with government cybersecurity agencies.

Access Control

Cyber defense begins with the entryways into a nation's information networks. In Ukraine in recent years, hackers entered poorly protected networks by techniques as simple as guessing passwords or intercepting their use on unsecure computers.

More sophisticated cyberattacks in Ukraine used social engineering techniques, including [phishing emails](#) that tricked network users into revealing IDs and passwords. Clicking an unknown link can also open the door to tracking malware that can learn password information.

Neuberger's recommendation for adopting [multifactor password authentication](#) recognizes that users will never be perfect. Even cybersecurity experts have made mistakes in their decisions to provide passwords or personal information on insecure or deceptive sites. The simple step of [authenticating a login](#) on an approved device limits the access a hacker can obtain from just gaining personal information.

Software Vulnerabilities

The programmers who develop apps and networks are rewarded by improving performance and functionality. The problem is that even the best developers often overlook vulnerabilities as they add new code. For this reason, users should permit software updates because these are how developers patch uncovered weaknesses once identified.

Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, Russian hackers identified a [vulnerability](#) in Microsoft's leading data management software. This was similar to a weakness in network software that allowed Russian hackers to unleash the [NotPetya](#) malware on Ukrainian networks in 2017. The attack caused an estimated \$10 billion in damage worldwide.

Just days before Russian tanks began crossing into Ukraine in February 2022, Russian hackers used a vulnerability in the market-leading data management software SQL to place on Ukrainian servers "[wiper](#)" [malware](#) that erases stored data. However, over the last five years Ukrainian institutions have significantly strengthened their cybersecurity. Most notably, Ukrainian organizations have shifted away from pirated enterprise software, and they integrated their information systems into the global cybersecurity community of technology firms and data protection agencies.

As a result, the Microsoft Threat Intelligence Center [identified the new malware](#) as it began appearing on Ukrainian networks. The early warning allowed Microsoft to distribute a patch around the world to prevent the servers from being erased by this malware.

Backing Up Data

Ransomware attacks already frequently target [public and private organizations](#) in the U.S. The hackers lock out users from an institution's data networks and demand payment to return access to them.

Wiper malware used in the Russian cyberattacks on Ukraine operates in a similar manner to ransomware. However, [pseudo ransomware](#) attacks permanently destroy an institution's access to its data.

Backing up critical data is an important step in reducing the impact of wiper or ransomware attacks. Some private organizations have even taken to [storing data on two separate cloud-based systems](#). This reduces the chances that attacks could deprive an organization of the data it needs to continue operating.

Drills and Cooperation

The last set of Neuberger's recommendations is to continually conduct cybersecurity drills while maintaining cooperative relationships with federal cyber defense agencies. In the months leading up to Russia's invasion, Ukrainian organizations benefited from [working closely with U.S. agencies](#) to bolster the cybersecurity of critical infrastructure. The agencies helped scan Ukrainian networks for malware and supported penetration tests that use hacker tools to look for vulnerabilities that can give hackers access to their systems.

Small and large organizations in the U.S. concerned about cyberattacks should seek a strong relationship with a [wide-range](#) of federal agencies responsible for cybersecurity. [Recent regulations](#) require firms to disclose information on cyberattacks to their networks. But organizations should turn to cybersecurity authorities before experiencing a cyberattack.

U.S. government agencies offer [best practices](#) for training staff, including the use of tabletop and simulated attack exercises. As Ukrainians have learned, tomorrow's cyberattacks can only be countered by preparing today.

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HEADLINE	04/06 WatchGuard failed disclose critical flaw
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2022/04/watchguard-failed-to-disclose-critical-flaw-exploited-by-russian-hackers/
GIST	<p>Security vendor WatchGuard quietly fixed a critical vulnerability in a line of its firewall devices and didn't explicitly disclose the flaw until Wednesday, following revelations hackers from Russia's military apparatus exploited it en masse to assemble a massive botnet.</p> <p>Law enforcement agencies in the US and UK on February 23 warned that members of Sandworm—among the Russian government's most aggressive and elite hacker groups—were infecting WatchGuard firewalls with malware that made the firewalls part of a vast botnet. On the same day, WatchGuard released a software tool and instructions for identifying and locking down infected devices. Among the instructions was ensuring appliances were running the latest version of the company's Fireware OS.</p> <p>Putting customers at unnecessary risk</p> <p>In court documents unsealed on Wednesday, an FBI agent wrote that the WatchGuard firewalls hacked by Sandworm were “vulnerable to an exploit that allows unauthorized remote access to the management panels of those devices.” It wasn't until after the court document was public that WatchGuard published this FAQ, which for the first time made reference to CVE-2022-23176, a vulnerability with a severity rating of 8.8 out of a possible 10.</p> <p>“WatchGuard Firebox and XTM appliances allow a remote attacker with unprivileged credentials to access the system with a privileged management session via exposed management access,” the description</p>

read. “This vulnerability impacts Fireware OS before 12.7.2_U1, 12.x before 12.1.3_U3, and 12.2.x through 12.5.x before 12.5.7_U3.”

The WatchGuard FAQ said that CVE-2022-23176 had been “fully addressed by security fixes that started rolling out in software updates in May 2021.” The FAQ went on to say that investigations by WatchGuard and outside security firm Mandiant “did not find evidence the threat actor exploited a different vulnerability.”

When WatchGuard released the May 2021 software updates, the company made only the most oblique of references to the vulnerability.

“These releases also include fixes to resolve internally detected security issues,” a [company post](#) stated. “These issues were found by our engineers and not actively found in the wild. For the sake of not guiding potential threat actors toward finding and exploiting these internally discovered issues, we are not sharing technical details about these flaws that they contained.”

According to Wednesday’s FAQ, FBI agents informed WatchGuard in November that about 1 percent of the firewalls it had sold had been infected by Cyclops Blink, a new strain of malware developed by Sandworm to replace a botnet the [FBI dismantled in 2018](#). Three months after learning of the infections from the FBI, WatchGuard published the detection tool and the accompanying 4-Step Diagnosis and Remediation Plan for infected devices. The company obtained the CVE-2022-23176 designation a day later, on February 24.

Even after all of these steps, including obtaining the CVE, however, the company still didn’t explicitly disclose the critical vulnerability that had been fixed in the May 2021 software updates. Security professionals, many of whom have spent weeks working to rid the Internet of vulnerable devices, blasted WatchGuard for the failure to explicitly disclose.

“As it turns out, threat actors *DID* find and exploit the issues,” Will Dormann, a vulnerability analyst at CERT, said in a private message. He was referring to the WatchGuard explanation from May that the company was withholding technical details to prevent the security issues from being exploited. “And without a CVE issued, more of their customers were exposed than needed to be.”

He continued:

WatchGuard should have assigned a CVE when they released an update that fixed the vulnerability. They also had a second chance to assign a CVE when they were contacted by the FBI in November. But they waited for nearly 3 full months after the FBI notification (about 8 months total) before assigning a CVE. This behavior is harmful, and it put their customers at unnecessary risk.

WatchGuard representatives didn’t respond to repeated requests for clarification or comment.

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HEADLINE	04/06 ECJ bans general telco data retention
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/fighting-crime-doesnt-justify-mandatory-data-retention-european-court-of-justice/
GIST	<p>The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has effectively banned the general use of telecommunications data retention for combating crime across the European Union.</p> <p>In a judgment delivered by the ECJ's Grand Chamber on Tuesday, the court ruled that when the objective is combating crime, "the general and indiscriminate retention of traffic and location data exceeds the limits of what is strictly necessary and cannot be considered to be justified within a democratic society".</p> <p>"Criminal behaviour, even of a particularly serious nature, cannot be treated in the same way as a threat to national security."</p>

Traffic data is defined in EU law as "any data processed for the purpose of the conveyance of a communication on an electronic communications network or for the billing thereof".

Location data is "any data processed in an electronic communications network or by an electronic communications service, indicating the geographic position of the terminal equipment of a user of a publicly available electronic communications service".

This is more or less the same as what has been called "metadata" in Australia's data retention debate.

The now-invalid Irish [Communications \(Retention of Data\) Act 2011](#) required telecommunications providers to retain all metadata for two years, and make it available to the Gardaí, the Irish national police, following a "disclosure request" issued by an officer ranked chief superintendent or above.

A disclosure request could be issued for "(a) the prevention, detection, investigation or prosecution of a serious offence, (b) the safeguarding of the security of the State, [or] (c) the saving of human life."

A "serious offence" was defined as one which is punishable by five years or more in jail, or one listed in a [schedule](#) to the Act.

Metadata is "no less sensitive" than the content

"In view of the sensitive nature of the information that traffic and location data may provide, the confidentiality of those data is essential for the right to respect for private life," the court wrote.

The [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#) guarantees both "the right to respect for his or her private and family life, home and communications" and "the right to the protection of personal data concerning him or her".

While the Charter protects all personal data, the ECJ noted that traffic and location data is particularly sensitive.

"[Such] data may reveal information on a significant number of aspects of the private life of the persons concerned, including sensitive information such as sexual orientation, political opinions, religious, philosophical, societal or other beliefs and state of health."

This information enjoys special protection under EU law, for historical reasons which should be obvious.

"Taken as a whole, those data may allow very precise conclusions to be drawn concerning the private lives of the persons whose data have been retained, such as the habits of everyday life, permanent or temporary places of residence, daily or other movements, the activities carried out, the social relationships of those persons and the social environments frequented by them," the court wrote.

"In particular, those data provide the means of establishing a profile of the individuals concerned, information that is no less sensitive, having regard to the right to privacy, than the actual content of communications."

The ECJ judgment does not prevent data retention to address threats to national security, however.

These threats include such things as "protecting the essential functions of the State and the fundamental interests of society through the prevention and punishment of activities capable of seriously destabilising the fundamental constitutional, political, economic or social structures of a country and, in particular, of directly threatening society, the population or the State itself, such as terrorist activities".

"Unlike crime, even particularly serious crime, a threat to national security must be genuine and present, or, at the very least, foreseeable, which presupposes that sufficiently concrete circumstances have arisen to be able to justify a generalised and indiscriminate measure of retention of traffic and location data for a limited period of time."

A decision to implement data retention should be "subject to effective review" by a court or an independent administrative body, the court said.

Convicted murderer Graham Dwyer may now be set free

The ECJ decision relates to the 2015 conviction in Ireland of Graham Dwyer for the August 2012 murder of Elaine O'Hara, a childcare worker.

As the *Guardian* put it, Dwyer had killed O'Hara after "grooming her for sadomasochistic fantasies that included stabbing women during sex".

"He committed what prosecutors called 'very nearly the perfect murder' but was caught and sentenced to life in prison after police tracked his movements through texts and phone data. There were no witnesses or physical evidence," [the Guardian wrote](#).

"Dwyer appealed on the grounds the retention and accessing of his mobile phone data breached EU law."

According to the *Irish Examiner*, families of homicide victims are saying [some murders could now go unsolved](#). They said it was "common sense" that the protection of life should take precedence over rights to privacy.

But as the ECJ noted, "the effectiveness of criminal proceedings generally depends not on a single means of investigation but on all the means of investigation available to the competent national authorities for those purposes."

Dwyer is not yet free, however. His lawyers must now convince the Irish Supreme Court that the ECJ decision applies retroactively.

European decision gives ammunition to Australian privacy advocates

Australia's [mandatory data retention scheme](#) is similar to the now-discredited Irish system.

Australian telcos must retain metadata for two years.

Officers from a range of agencies above a certain rank may request the retained data to investigate crimes punishable by three years or more in jail -- a lower threshold than in Ireland.

In the 2020-2021 financial year, [more than 314,000 requests for telco data](#) were made under this system.

The ECJ's judgment now gives ammunition to Australian digital rights campaigners who have long objected to data retention.

"Australia's data retention regime is essentially the same as the one the ICJ has found to be unlawful. It should be dismantled immediately," said Justin Warren, chair of Electronic Frontiers Australia.

"Surveillance is not safety. If Australia wishes to continue to claim to be a democratic society, we must abandon the reflexive surveillance set up to assuage the authoritarian desires of law enforcement and certain political actors. Our individual and collective privacy must be restored," he told ZDNet.

"Australia needs to decide what sort of country it wants to be. We can either be a liberal democracy or a country that uses indiscriminate mass-surveillance. We cannot be both."

However unlike the EU, and unlike other liberal democracies, Australia lacks a charter or bill of rights, the document which underpinned the ECJ decision.

In December 2021, the Department of Home Affairs [started work on a complete overhaul](#) of Australia electronic surveillance laws.

	<p>The creation of a new Electronic Surveillance Act was a key recommendation of a comprehensive review of Australia's intelligence community. It aims to unravel the tangle of surveillance laws.</p> <p>Public submissions on that discussion paper closed on 11 February. An exposure draft of the proposed electronic surveillance legislation is planned to be released for public comment in late 2022.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Hackers distribute fake shopping apps
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/hackers-distributing-fake-shopping-apps.html
GIST	<p>Threat actors have been distributing malicious applications under the guise of seemingly harmless shopping apps to target customers of eight Malaysian banks since at least November 2021.</p> <p>The attacks involved setting up fraudulent but legitimate-looking websites to trick users into downloading the apps, Slovak cybersecurity firm ESET said in a report shared with The Hacker News.</p> <p>The copycat websites impersonated cleaning services such as Maid4u, Grabmaid, Maria's Cleaning, Maid4u, YourMaid, Maideasy and MaidACall and a pet store named PetsMore, all of which are aimed at users in Malaysia.</p> <p>"The threat actors use these fake e-shop applications to phish for banking credentials," ESET said. "The apps also forward all SMS messages received by the victim to the malware operators in case they contain 2FA codes sent by the bank."</p> <p>The targeted banks include Maybank, Affin Bank, Public Bank Berhad, CIMB bank, BSN, RHB, Bank Islam Malaysia, and Hong Leong Bank.</p> <p>The websites, distributed through Facebook ads, urge visitors to download what the attackers claim to be are Android apps available on the Google Play Store, but in reality, redirect them to rogue servers under their control.</p> <p>It's worth noting here that the attack hinges on the prerequisite that the potential victims enable the non-default "Install unknown apps" option on their devices for it to succeed. What's more, five of the abused services don't even have an app on Google Play.</p> <p>Once launched, the apps prompt the users to sign in to their accounts, allowing them to place fake orders, following which options are presented to complete the checkout process by including a fund transfer from their bank accounts.</p> <p>"After picking the direct transfer option, victims are presented [with] a fake FPX payment page and asked to choose their bank out of the eight Malaysian banks provided, and then enter their credentials," ESET malware researcher Lukáš Štefanko said.</p> <p>The ultimate goal of the campaign is to steal the banking credentials entered by the users and exfiltrate it to the attacker-controlled server, while displaying an error message that the entered user ID or password is invalid.</p> <p>In addition, the fake apps are engineered to access and transmit all SMS messages received by the users to the remote server in the event the bank accounts are secured by two-factor authentication.</p> <p>"While the campaign targets Malaysia exclusively for now, it might expand to other countries and banks later on," Štefanko said. "At this time, the attackers are after banking credentials, but they may also enable the theft of credit card information in the future."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Hamas-linked APT targets Israel officials
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/hamas-linked-hackers-using-sexy-facebook-catfish-lures-new-malware
GIST	<p>APT-C-23, a Hamas-linked attack group, is said to be involved in a sophisticated catfishing campaign targeting high ranking Israeli officials. Beyond elaborate Facebook-focused social engineering, the group has introduced new malware including a fake messaging app (known as VolatileVenom), a downloader (known as Barbie Downloader) and a backdoor (BarbWire Backdoor).</p> <p>The campaign individually targets high profile officials working in defense, law enforcement, emergency services, and other government-related organizations. The attack involves social engineering, a downloader, a backdoor and a separate Android malware. The purpose appears to be espionage. The campaign was discovered and analyzed by Cybereason's Nocturnus researcher team.</p> <p>APT-C-23 and Molerats are thought to be the two primary sub-groups of the Hamas cyberwarfare division. Hamas is classified as a terrorist group in most of North America and Europe. 'Catfishing' is the creation of a fake online identity, using part or all of a genuine identity, with the usual intent to damage reputations. In this case the purpose is to create a very realistic identity that can be used to ensnare victims. The current campaign has been dubbed, Operation Bearded Barbie.</p> <p>The attacks start from a fake (catfished) Facebook network of attractive females, report the researchers. The accounts are established and well-maintained, with the attackers joining relevant groups, posting in Hebrew to those groups, and friending friends of the targets. The purpose is to connect with the officials and slowly draw them into a virtual sexual relationship.</p> <p>Once this connection is made and Facebook chats established, the catfish attacker suggests migrating to WhatsApp. This immediately gives the attacker the target's phone number. As the conversations become more personal and sexual, the attacker suggests they should use a 'safer' and more 'discrete' means of communication. A specific Android app is recommended.</p> <p>The Android app is really the VolatileVenom malware. On pre-Android 10 devices the icon is hidden; on post Android 10 the malware uses the Google Play installer icon. But when the victim attempts to sign into the application, an error message is shown announcing the app will be uninstalled. VolatileVenom remains running in the background with a wide range of espionage capabilities.</p> <p>Separately, the attacker also offers to send the victim a private video. This is delivered as a .rar file that comprises the video and the Barbie Downloader. "The video," say the researchers, "is meant to distract the victim from the infection process that is happening in the background." The infection process includes performing anti-analysis checks and gathering system information.</p> <p>If the downloader assesses the host to be suitable, it connects to an embedded C2 server (otherwise it just terminates). The C2 server delivers the BarbWire Backdoor. The downloader has a back-up method of locating an alternative C2. If, for any reason, the attackers wish to change the C2 from the one embedded, they can simply include the new destination in an SMS message. The downloader intercepts all incoming SMS messages. If one comes from the attackers, it can simply extract the new C2 details and download the backdoor.</p> <p>The researchers describe BarbWire as, "a very capable piece of malware, and it is obvious that a lot of effort was put into hiding its capabilities behind string encryption, API hashing, and process protection. Its main goal is to fully compromise the victim machine, gaining access to their most sensitive data."</p> <p>BarbWire steals data via a range of file types, including PDFs, Office files, archives, image files, videos and images. It also looks for external media such as a CD-ROM file – which suggests it may be looking for super-sensitive data that is often moved around physically rather than by telecommunication means. Stolen data is staged in a RAR archive and exfiltrated to the attackers' C2 server.</p> <p>Campaigns have been ongoing since September 2021. Despite the new malware and the more than usually sophisticated social engineering element, the Cybereason Nocturnus researchers assess 'with moderate-</p>

	<p>high confidence’ that the attackers are the Hamas-linked APT-C-23 group. The campaign exhibits what the researchers describe as ‘a considerable step-up in APT-C-23 capabilities’.</p> <p>Other campaigns against more common Palestinian and Arabic-speaking targets are continuing, but this campaign uses a separate infrastructure from the known APT-C-23 infrastructure and new malware specifically designed for Israeli targets. The researchers note that some victims have been infected with both VolatileVenom and BarbWire Backdoor. “This ‘tight grip’ on their targets attests to how important and sensitive this campaign was for the threat actors,” they say.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Fox News misconfiguration exposes files
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/employee-info-13-million-records/
GIST	<p>A configuration error exposed millions of internal records traced back to Fox News, including personally identifiable information on employees, researchers have claimed.</p> <p>A team at Website Planet led by Jeremiah Fowler claimed that anyone with an internet connection could theoretically have discovered the 58GB trove, which was left open with no password protection.</p> <p>It contained almost 13 million records of content management data, including an unspecified number of employee details.</p> <p>“Upon further research nearly all records contained information indicating Fox News content, storage information, internal Fox emails, usernames, employee ID numbers, affiliate station information and more,” wrote Fowler.</p> <p>“One folder contained 65,000 names of celebrities, cast and production crew members and their internal Fox ID reference numbers. The records also captured a wide range of data points including event logging, host names, host account numbers, IP addresses, interface, device data, and much more.”</p> <p>Fowler argued that the 700+ internal Fox email addresses could have been leveraged by fraudsters to carry out follow-on phishing attacks, while the database itself could have been encrypted and held to ransom.</p> <p>Many of the records were labeled “prod,” which Fowler claimed usually indicates production or live records. However, a speedy response from the Fox News team seemed to suggest not.</p> <p>“Thank you again for sharing your observations. As a follow up to our email yesterday, we have continued to investigate and we have determined that the database referenced in your email is a development environment not connected to any production environment,” it said in response to the researcher’s findings.</p> <p>“The ability to publicly access such database has been addressed. As part of our investigation, we are reviewing logs to determine any anonymous access to the database.”.</p> <p>Although it’s unclear how long the database was exposed, Fowler claimed the Fox team “acted fast and professionally” to mitigate the issue once notified.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 US sanctions crypto-exchange Garantex
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-sanctions-crypto-exchange-garantex-for-aiding-hydra-market/
GIST	The U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office has announced sanctions against the cryptocurrency exchange Garantex, which has been linked to illegal transactions for Hydra Market.

At the same time, the U.S. Department of Justice has named the operator of Hydra Market's seized infrastructure and connected him to several years of involvement with cyber-criminal activities.

Hydra, the world's largest darknet market for illegal narcotics, stolen data, and cybercrime tools and services, was [dismantled yesterday](#) by the German police, who located and confiscated its servers.

The Federal Criminal Police Office in Germany (BKA) told BleepingComputer that no arrests were made, and as the investigation into unmasking the operators is still underway, they could not provide any further information.

During the operation, 543.3 bitcoin were seized, worth \$24.3 million at today's values, a tiny portion of Hydra's massive annual turnover from narcotic sales and various illicit services.

Soon after, the U.S. Department of Justice published an announcement to highlight its participation in the law enforcement operation and introduced sanctions against the marketplace operators.

DoJ's announcement also named Dmitry Olegovich Pavlov, 30, a resident of Russia, for administrating the seized Hydra Market servers and for conspiracy to commit money laundering and narcotics distribution.

"Starting in or about November 2015, Pavlov is alleged to have operated a company, Promservice Ltd., also known as Hosting Company Full Drive, All Wheel Drive, and 4x4host.ru, that administered Hydra's servers (Promservice)," details the [U.S. DoJ announcement](#).

"During that time, Pavlov, through his company Promservice, administered Hydra's servers, which allowed the market to operate as a platform used by thousands of drug dealers and other unlawful vendors to distribute large quantities of illegal drugs and other illicit goods and services to thousands of buyers, and to launder billions of dollars derived from these unlawful transactions."

Pavlov is alleged to have reaped commissions worth millions of USD as a result of his crucial role in facilitating Hydra's activities.

Garantex bashed

Yesterday, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office also sanctioned Garantex, a popular cryptocurrency exchange operating out of the Federation Tower in Moscow.

Garantex is accused of facilitating the money laundering operations for the Hydra marketplace, which directly violates existing anti-money laundering and terrorism anti-financing regulations.

"Analysis of known Garantex transactions shows that over \$100 million in transactions are associated with illicit actors and darknet markets, including nearly \$6 million from Russian RaaS gang Conti and also including approximately \$2.6 million from Hydra," mentions the [U.S. Treasury announcement](#).

Garantex, initially registered in Estonia, was already facing legal trouble in the European country, losing its license to provide services in February 2022 after an investigation by Estonia's Financial Intelligence Unit.

The U.S. Treasury also published a list of [100 cryptocurrency wallet addresses](#) directly linked to Hydra Market's operations, which are to be blocked from all legal blockchain stakeholders.

In addition to the above, any entities that hold 50% or more of the assets held by the sanctioned entities will also be blocked and must report to OFAC.

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HEADLINE	04/06 US disrupts Russia Cyclops Blink botnet
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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-disrupts-russian-cyclops-blink-botnet-before-being-used-in-attacks/
GIST	<p>US government officials announced today the disruption of the Cyclops Blink botnet controlled by the Russian-backed Sandworm hacking group before being used in attacks.</p> <p>The malware, used by Sandworm to create this botnet since at least June 2019, is targeting WatchGuard Firebox firewall appliances and multiple ASUS router models.</p> <p>Cyclops Blink enables the attackers to establish persistence on the device through firmware updates, providing remote access to compromised networks.</p> <p>This malware is modular, making it easy to upgrade to target new devices and tap into new pools of exploitable hardware.</p> <p>"We are announcing today [...] the disruption of a global botnet controlled by the Russian military intelligence agency, commonly known as the GRU," US Attorney General Merrick Garland said.</p> <p>"The Russian government has recently used similar infrastructure to attack Ukrainian targets. Fortunately, we were able to disrupt this botnet before it could be used.</p> <p>"Thanks to our close work with international partners we were able to detect the infection of thousands of network hardware devices. We were then able to disable the GRU's control over those devices before the botnet could be weaponized."</p> <p>Malware removed from infected Watchguard and Asus devices</p> <p>Following this US Justice Department operation's initial March 18 court authorization, the malware was removed from all remaining identified Watchguard devices acting as command and control servers.</p> <p>The FBI has also notified owners of compromised devices in the United States and abroad through foreign law enforcement partners before removing the Cyclops Blink malware. US victims whose contact info was not found were contacted by their providers following notices issued by the FBI.</p> <p>FBI Director Chris Wray said the botnet was disrupted following close cooperation with Watchguard while analyzing the malware and developing detection tools and remediation techniques.</p> <p>"I should caution that as we move forward, any Firebox devices that acted as bots, may still remain vulnerable in the future until mitigated by their owners. So those owners should still go ahead and adopt Watchguard's detection and remediation steps as soon as possible," FBI Director Chris Wray added.</p> <p>"Sandworm strung them together to use their computing power in a way that would obfuscate who was really running the network and let them launch malware or to orchestrate distributed denial of service attacks, like the GRU has already used to attack Ukraine."</p> <p>WatchGuard has shared detailed instructions on how to restore compromised Firebox appliances to a clean state to remediate the infection and update them to the latest Fireware OS version to prevent future infections.</p> <p><i>WatchGuard played an important role in eliminating the threat posed by Cyclops Blink, with the rapid release of detection and remediation tools to protect its partners and customers following the government disclosure of the malware, and by cooperating with the U. S. Department of Justice in its effort to disrupt the botnet. The company's close collaboration with its partner and customer communities was instrumental in mitigating this sophisticated state-sponsored threat, which affected less than 1% of WatchGuard appliances. — WatchGuard spokesperson</i></p> <p>The Sandworm Russian-backed threat group</p>

[Sandworm](#) (also tracked as Voodoo Bear, BlackEnergy, and TeleBots), the group behind the Cyclops Blink botnet, is a Russian-sponsored hacking group active since the mid-2000s.

Its operators are believed to be Russian military hackers part of Unit 74455 of the Russian GRU's Main Center for Special Technologies (GTsST).

Sandworm was linked to the BlackEnergy malware behind blackouts in Ukraine in 2015 and 2016 [1, 2, 3], the [KillDisk wiper attacks](#) against Ukrainian banks, and highly destructive [NotPetya ransomware](#) used to inflict billions worth of damage to companies worldwide starting with June 2017.

"Sandworm is the premier Russian cyber attack capability and one of the actors we have been most concerned about in light of the invasion," John Hultquist, Mandiant VP of Intelligence Analysis, told BleepingComputer.

"We are concerned that they could be used to hit targets in Ukraine, but we are also concerned they may hit targets in the West in retribution for the pressure being placed on Russia."

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HEADLINE	04/06 FFDroider malware targets social media
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-ffdroider-malware-steals-facebook-instagram-twitter-accounts/
GIST	<p>A new information stealer named FFDroider has emerged, stealing credentials and cookies stored in browsers to hijack victims' social media accounts.</p> <p>Social Media accounts, especially verified ones, are an attractive target for hackers as threat actors can use them for various malicious activities, including conducting cryptocurrency scams and distributing malware.</p> <p>These accounts are even more attractive when they have access to the social site's ad platforms, allowing threat actors to use the stolen credentials to run malicious advertisements.</p> <p>Distributed through software cracks</p> <p>Researchers at Zscaler have been tracking the new info-stealer and its spread and published a detailed technical analysis today based on recent samples.</p> <p>Like many malware, FFDroider is spread through software cracks, free software, games, and other files downloaded from torrent sites.</p> <p>When installing these downloads, FFDroider will also be installed, but disguised as the Telegram desktop app to evade detection.</p> <p>Once launched, the malware will create a Windows registry key named "FFDroider," which led to the naming of this new malware.</p> <p>FFDroid targets cookies and account credentials stored in Google Chrome (and Chrome-based browsers), Mozilla Firefox, Internet Explorer, and Microsoft Edge.</p> <p>For example, the malware reads and parses the Chromium SQLite cookie and SQLite Credential stores and decrypts the entries by abusing Windows Crypt API, specifically, the CryptUnProtectData function.</p> <p>The procedure is similar for the other browsers, with functions like InternetGetCookieRxW and IEGetProtectedMode Cookie abused for snatching all cookies stored in Explorer and Edge.</p> <p>The stealing and decryption results in cleartext usernames and passwords, which are then exfiltrated via an HTTP POST request to the C2 server; in this campaign, http://152[.]32[.]228[.]19/seomorebty.</p>

Targeting social media

Unlike many other password-stealing trojans, FFDroid's operators aren't interested in all account credentials stored in the web browsers.

Instead, the malware developers are focusing on stealing credentials for social media accounts and eCommerce sites, including Facebook, Instagram, Amazon, eBay, Etsy, Twitter, and the portal for the WAX Cloud wallet.

The goal is to steal valid cookies that can be used to authenticate on these platforms, and this is tested on the fly by the malware during the procedure.

If the authentication is successful on Facebook for example, FFDroider fetches all Facebook pages and bookmarks, the number of the victim's friends, and their account billing and payment information from the Facebook Ads manager.

The threat actors may use this information to run fraudulent ad campaigns on the social media platform and promote their malware to a larger audience.

If successfully logged in on Instagram, FFDroider will open the account edit web page to grab the account's email address, mobile phone number, username, password, and other details.

This is an interesting aspect of the info-stealer's functionality because it isn't just trying to grab credentials but to log in on the platform and steal even more information.

After stealing the information and sending everything to the C2, FFDroid focuses on downloading additional modules from its servers at fixed time intervals.

Zscaler's analysts haven't provided many details about these modules, but having a downloader functionality makes the threat even more potent.

To avoid this type of malware, people should stay away from illegal downloads and unknown software sources. As an extra precaution, downloads can be uploaded to VirusTotal to check if antivirus solutions detect it as malware.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Texas Dept. of Insurance exposes 1.8M
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/texas-department-insurance-exposed-data-18-million-people?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The Texas Department of Insurance recently disclosed a “data security event” that appears to have affected roughly 1.8 million people.</p> <p>The Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) disclosed the incident on March 24, but DataBreaches.net noticed that the Texas Attorney General’s office reported on April 4 that 1.8 million Texans are impacted.</p> <p>The exposed information includes names, addresses, phone numbers, dates of births, and partial or full social security numbers, as well as information about injuries and worker compensation claims.</p> <p>TDI has not shared too many details, but the incident does not appear to involve a breach by a third party. Based on its brief description, a critical vulnerability exposing user data was discovered in one of its web applications.</p> <p>TDI said it became aware of a security issue affecting one of its web applications on January 4. The affected app is used to manage workers’ compensation information.</p>

Return to Top	<p>“We found the issue was due to programming code that allowed internet access to a protected area of the application,” the organization said.</p> <p>The application was temporarily shut down after the security flaw was discovered and it was brought back online after the issue was fixed.</p> <p>It’s unclear for how long the data was exposed, but TDI claims that a forensics company searched the internet for the exposed information and it has found no evidence of misuse.</p> <p>Nevertheless, affected individuals are being offered free credit monitoring and identity theft protection services for 12 months. TDI is notifying individuals who made new compensation claims between March 2019 and January 2022, but others who made claims since 2006 may also qualify for the credit monitoring service.</p> <p>It’s possible that the vulnerability was reported to TDI by a cybersecurity researcher and that they will publicly disclose their findings in the upcoming period.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/05 Hackers flood internet stolen Russia files
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/security/hackers-flood-internet-say-are-russian-companies-files-rcna21853?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Emma Best is used to dealing with leaked files from American organizations.</p> <p>Best’s organization, Distributed Denial of Secrets, is best known for curating, publishing and promoting giant caches of files from a variety of sources, including U.S. police departments, the conservative social media platform Gab and the far-right Oathkeepers, a prominent group involved in the Jan. 6 riot.</p> <p>But since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Best and her colleagues have been inundated with files that hackers say they’ve stolen from Russian banks, energy companies, government agencies and media companies. For weeks, the group has scrambled to translate, verify, format and upload files that they can assess are legitimate and new, with the caveat that they usually haven’t gone through every single file to assess if it hasn’t been altered or planted with malicious software.</p> <p>“Frankly, we’ve never seen this much data out of Russia before,” Best said. “Russia has never really been a target like this before” by hackers.</p> <p>The consequences may not be fully known for years as experts sift through the files.</p> <p>“The hackers went for Russian state companies where they could inflict the most pain for the Kremlin,” said Agnia Grigas, a Russia and energy industry expert at the Atlantic Council, a think tank.</p> <p>NBC News has not verified the contents of the leaks, many of which contain dozens of gigabytes worth of data. None of the organizations, including the state-controlled energy companies Transneft and Rosatom, government censor Roskomnadzor, the Central Bank of Russia, and state-owned media giant VGTRK, responded to email inquiries requesting comment. But there’s little doubt among people who study Russia and cybersecurity that they’re largely authentic.</p> <p>The leaks are part of a larger ecosystem of amateurs trying to help Ukraine’s war efforts with their own keyboards. While Russia has conducted cyberattacks against Ukrainian internet service providers and tried to wipe Ukrainian government systems, the conflict hasn’t produced the kind of high-profile cyberattacks that some analysts had predicted.</p> <p>That’s left room for a thriving online ecosystem of new and veteran hackers whose accomplishments are difficult to measure in the context of the broader conflict. Some of the hackers spam Russians’ phones with texts about the war. Others spend their days briefly knocking Russian websites and services offline.</p>

It's not clear, however, just who is behind these hack-and-leak operations. Just about every hacktivist uses a pseudonym online, and hacking communities tend to be informally organized if at all.

But Best said their motivations tend to be clear.

"Right now, leakers, hacktivists and the rest of the general public are screaming in response to the injustice of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the inhumanity of the war crimes committed by the invaders," she said.

While Distributed Denial of Secrets might be the single best public repository of all the Russian files purportedly leaked since the start of the invasion, it's only one of many places online to find alleged leaks from Russia.

Dozens of activist and hacktivist accounts on Twitter and Telegram post Russian files, some of which are repackaged from earlier leaks. Best has rejected multiple submissions of supposed leaks from Russia that didn't pass her group's verification process, she said.

Ukrainian authorities have also leaked remarkable sets of supposedly sensitive information. They've published the personal information of 620 Russian intelligence officers and lists of military personnel they accuse of war crimes. Someone gave the Ukrainian news site Pravda a list of alleged Russian soldiers and their personal information, which it published in full. Even the detailed workings of one of the most destructive ransomware gangs in history has been spilled onto the internet, after a Ukrainian hacker grew fed up with the Russians who ran it.

"There's an intense desire to do something," Best said, "but also to understand."

Cybersecurity experts often urge caution in drawing conclusions from hacked and leaked documents from shadowy figures, as there's some precedent for them to contain individually modified files to plant a false narrative. There's also no way to guarantee the files are the full content of what an organization had. When WikiLeaks published its "Syrian Files" in 2012, for example, it conspicuously left out a major transfer with a Russian bank, something that went unnoticed for four years.

While a leak can seriously hurt businesses in normal circumstances, those in Russia probably currently have bigger concerns, said Michael Daniel, the president of the Cyber Threat Alliance, a cybersecurity industry trade group.

"Lord only knows how Russia's going to handle that right now," Daniel said. "That's probably not their primary concern, although it could be. But in a normal country and organization it would be."

Open-source researchers who pore through reams of information from Russia said it could take years before such leaks could reveal important information.

"I've gone through a few of them but honestly haven't had time to [do a] really super deep dive," said Aric Toler, a researcher at BellingCat, an investigative journalism group that has exposed several major Russian intelligence operations.

"This happens a lot, to where there is all this hype for mega flows of info than hardly anyone actually goes through it," he said. "They really require specialist interest and expertise."

Stefan Soesanto, a senior cyberdefense researcher at the Center for Security Studies, a Swiss think tank, said it was mistaken to think Russian officials or executives would somehow be shamed or deterred by having their files made public.

"To me it is unclear how these data leaks are supposed to affect the course of the war in Ukraine," Soesanto said. They would likely have more of an effect on those organizations if they were deploying

	<p>ransomware or destructive malware to their networks, he said, though that could require additional technical sophistication to pull off.</p> <p>“The question that I would be interested in is to know why these groups are dumping all this largely worthless data instead of running wipers or ransomware campaigns,” he said. “Guess 99 percent simply don’t have the network access and privileges they want people to think they have.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 India: China tried cyberattack on power grid
SOURCE	https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/chinese-state-sponsored-hackers-targeted-indian-electricity-dispatch-centres-near-ladakh-recorded-future-inc-report-2867638?web_view=true
GIST	<p>New Delhi: Chinese state-sponsored hackers targeted Indian electricity distribution centres near Ladakh over the last eight months, a report by private intelligence firm Recorded Future said on Wednesday, in a new potential flashpoint following a protracted military standoff between the two countries in the region. The government said the attacks were not successful.</p> <p>"In recent months, we observed likely network intrusions targeting at least seven Indian State Load Despatch Centres (SLDCs) responsible for carrying out real-time operations for grid control and electricity dispatch within these respective states. Notably, this targeting has been geographically concentrated, with the identified SLDCs located in North India, in proximity to the disputed India-China border in Ladakh," the group said.</p> <p>The attacks took place between August last year and March, sources said. The investigation found the data passing in and out of Indian Load Despatch Centres to the Chinese state-sponsored command and control servers spread across the world, they said.</p> <p>"In addition to the targeting of power grid assets, we also identified the compromise of a national emergency response system and the Indian subsidiary of a multinational logistics company by the same threat activity group," Recorded Future said.</p> <p>The group said they alerted the government of their findings before publishing the report.</p> <p>"Two attempts by Chinese hackers were made to target electricity distribution centres near Ladakh but were not successful... We've already strengthened our defence system to counter such cyber attacks," Power Minister RK Singh was quoted as saying by news agency ANI.</p> <p>According to the intelligence firm, considered to be among the world's largest with a specialisation in identifying threats from state-sponsored hackers, the Chinese attackers were trying to gather information surrounding critical infrastructure systems.</p> <p>"Given the continued targeting of State and Regional Load Despatch Centres in India over the past 18 months, first from RedEcho and now in this latest TAG-38 activity, this targeting is likely a long-term strategic priority for select Chinese state-sponsored threat actors active within India," it said.</p> <p>"The prolonged targeting of Indian power grid assets by Chinese state-linked groups offers limited economic espionage or traditional intelligence-gathering opportunities. We believe this targeting is instead likely intended to enable information gathering surrounding critical infrastructure systems or is pre-positioning for future activity," it added.</p> <p>"The objective for intrusions may include gaining an increased understanding into these complex systems in order to facilitate capability development for future use or gaining sufficient access across the system in preparation for future contingency operations," Recorded Future said.</p>

	<p>High profile cyber-attacks have been growing around the world. Last year millions of people on the US east coast were affected by a ransomware attack on a major gas pipeline while a large swathe of Australia was moments away from losing power after a key energy network was hit.</p> <p>The group said in February last year, it had reported the compromise of 10 distinct Indian power sector organisations, including four of the five Regional Load Despatch Centres (RLDC), two ports, a large generation operator, and other operational assets.</p> <p>"Recorded Future continues to track Chinese state-sponsored activity groups targeting a wide variety of sectors globally... However, the coordinated effort to target Indian power grid assets in recent years is notably distinct from our perspective and, given the continued heightened tension and border disputes between the two countries, we believe is a cause for concern," it said.</p> <p>India and China have long disputed their vast 3,500-km-long frontier and fought a brief border war in Arunachal Pradesh in 1962.</p> <p>Tensions flared in 2020 after a lethal high-altitude skirmish in the far-northern region of Ladakh, which saw hand-to-hand combat between troops in the contested Galwan Valley.</p> <p>Since then, multiple rounds of talks have had limited success in de-escalating tensions and both sides have reinforced the region with additional military hardware and thousands of extra soldiers.</p> <p>Last month, India said ties with China could not be normal until their troops pulled back from each other, but Beijing struck a conciliatory note during a meeting of their foreign ministers in New Delhi.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Apple restores opposition app in Russia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/04/06/navalny-apple-app-russia/
GIST	<p>Apple has resumed allowing Russians to download an app run by supporters of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny after criticism that it was acceding to unreasonable government demands for censorship.</p> <p>As reported by The Washington Post last month, law enforcement agents had repeatedly threatened the top Apple and Google officials in Russia with arrest in September unless they removed Navalny's "Smart Voting" app, which included more than a thousand endorsements of candidates for seats in Russia's legislature.</p> <p>Those demands came as voting was about to begin, and both companies complied. Google later reinstated the app for Android phones soon after the election, while Apple did not.</p> <p>That changed this week, according to independent researchers and Navalny's chief of staff, Leonid Volkov.</p> <p>Apple spokesmen declined to comment on the decision.</p> <p>The reversal comes amid escalating tensions between Russia and outside companies, many of which have withdrawn from the market or curtailed activities there since Russia invaded Ukraine. But civil liberties groups and American officials are pushing the other way, arguing that Apple and other tech companies provide ordinary Russians with the means to find independent news sources and to connect to activists and nonprofit organizations opposed to the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Apps are an especially critical form of communication in Russia now because the country's censorship apparatus has not been able to block or modify content flowing from installed apps to users' phones.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 US disrupts Russia GRU global botnet
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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/06/us-disrupts-russian-global-botnet-doi
GIST	<p>The US has disrupted a global “botnet” controlled by Russia’s military intelligence agency, Attorney General Merrick Garland announced on Wednesday.</p> <p>A botnet is a network of hijacked computers used to carry out cyberattacks. “The Russian government has recently used similar infrastructure to attack Ukrainian targets,” Garland told reporters at the justice department.</p> <p>“Fortunately, we were able to disrupt this botnet before it could be used. Thanks to our close work with international partners, we were able to detect the infection of thousands of network hardware devices.</p> <p>“We were then able to disable the GRU’s [the military intelligence agency] control over those devices before the botnet could be weaponised.”</p> <p>The attorney general also announced charges against Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev for sanctions violations. He said the billionaire had been previously identified as a source of financing for Russians promoting separatism in Crimea and providing support for the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic in eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>“After being sanctioned by the United States, Malofeyev attempted to evade the sanctions by using co-conspirators to surreptitiously acquire and run media outlets across Europe,” Garland said.</p> <p>The indictment is the first of a Russian oligarch in the US since the Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>In a related move, a federal court in the southern district of New York unsealed a criminal indictment against TV producer John Hanick, 71, a US citizen charged with violations of sanctions and false statements because of his work for Malofeyev over several years.</p> <p>Matthew Olsen, assistant attorney general of the justice department’s national security division, said: “The defendant Hanick knowingly chose to help Malofeyev spread his destabilizing messages by establishing, or attempting to establish, TV networks in Russia, Bulgaria and Greece, in violation of those sanctions.”</p> <p>Last month Garland, who is America’s top law enforcement official, announced the launch of Task Force KleptoCapture, an interagency law enforcement task force dedicated to enforcing the sweeping sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>He vowed on Wednesday: “Our message to those who continue to enable the Russian regime through their criminal conduct is this: it does not matter how far you sail your yacht, it does not matter how well you conceal your assets, it does not matter how cleverly you write your malware or hide your online activity.</p> <p>“The justice department will use every available tool to find you, disrupt your plots and hold you accountable.”</p> <p>Garland, whose grandparents fled antisemitism at the border of western Russia and eastern Europe more than a century ago, acknowledged horrific images that emerged from Bucha in Ukraine his week. “We have seen the dead bodies of civilians, some with bound hands, scattered in the streets. We have seen the mass graves. We have seen the bombed hospital, theatre and residential apartment buildings.</p> <p>“The world sees what is happening in Ukraine. The justice department sees what is happening in Ukraine. This department has a long history of helping to hold accountable those who perpetrate war crimes.”</p> <p>He noted that one of his predecessors, Attorney General Robert Jackson, later served as a chief American prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials after the second world war. “Today, we are assisting international efforts to identify and hold accountable those responsible for atrocities in Ukraine and we will continue to do so.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Twitch streamer falls victim 'swatting' call
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/puyallup-swatting-twitch/281-21dafa08-a4f3-49f2-bd1b-0028b337da4b
GIST	<p>PUYALLUP, Wash. — A Twitch streamer and his family living in Puyallup were the victims of a swatting call late Monday night after an unknown caller delivered a false report of a shooting and potential suicide using the family's address.</p> <p>A swatting call is defined as a hoax 911 call that typically involves extreme violence and is aimed at diverting emergency public resources to an unsuspecting person's home.</p> <p>The Puyallup Police Department responded shortly after 11 p.m. after a caller said they had shot a woman and were going to commit suicide, saying they were located in a home in the 300 block of 12th Street NW.</p> <p>Officers arrived on scene and staged a block away to develop a plan, according to an incident report. They were able to make contact via phone with one of the occupants in the home who exited from the home with her hands in the air and spoke with officers.</p> <p>Officers said she had two sons with her, and they stayed outside while additional officers confirmed no one in the home was injured.</p> <p>"These kids think this is a joke, or these people think this is a joke," the swatting victim, who wished to remain anonymous, said. "This is no joke, I mean lives could've been lost."</p> <p>One of the sons told police that he streams on Twitch, which is a video-sharing website mostly used by gamers. The son told police that his Twitch profile was somehow sold to someone without his permission last year, giving that person access to his home address, phone number and credit card information. Though he was able to regain control of his profile, the son said whoever purchased the account still had his address and phone number, officers said.</p> <p>He told police that over the last year since the incident he received photo messages from who he presumes was the unknown purchaser, showing pictures of his house and messages saying that the person knows where he lives.</p> <p>According to the son, the unknown person hasn't made any demands from the son.</p> <p>The number used to make the initial 911 call directed officers to a "TextNow" number, which is an app-based service.</p> <p>The son had previously called Puyallup police worried that he might be the victim to a swatting call after he started receiving the messages, officers said.</p> <p>Puyallup Police Captain Ryan Portmann said swatting can lead to dangerous situations.</p> <p>"The officers are on a heightened alert, the homeowner's on a heightened alert. Who's knocking on my door at 11:30 at night, right? Why are you here? And so, yeah, if they come to the door with a gun, and we're not able to quickly differentiate and diagnose what's going on, there's gonna be, or could be a negative consequence," Portmann said.</p> <p>The swatting victim said they worry about the future.</p> <p>"I don't know how I'm gonna sleep again because they said they usually do it again and again," they said. "So, is the SWAT team gonna come out every time my son streams? I don't know, and my son said, well maybe I should move out and I'm like you're gonna move out, I don't want you somewhere else, So we're like, we don't know what to do about it."</p>

Swatting is an issue for police in the western Washington region and across the U.S. The [problem became so prolific](#) that the Seattle Police Department created a couple of solutions that may help.

[SMART 911](#) was created by Seattle police and allows residents to create a profile that lets first responders know about their household, which can include details like a resident who is deaf, hard of hearing, has a medical condition or an allergy.

First responders would check this information before they get to the residence's door.

Seattle police also created the [Rave Facility](#), which allows commercial properties to register swatting concerns at particular addresses. If a 911 call taker receives a report for an incident at a facility, they are able to simultaneously dispatch officers and check if property owners believe they are likely to get swatted.

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HEADLINE	04/06 US secretly removed Russia malware
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/us/politics/us-russia-malware-cyberattacks.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The United States said on Wednesday that it had secretly removed malware from computer networks around the world in recent weeks, a step to preempt Russian cyberattacks and send a message to President Vladimir Putin of Russia.</p> <p>The move, made public by Attorney General Merrick Garland, comes as U.S. officials warn that Russia could try to strike American critical infrastructure — including financial firms, pipelines and the electric grid — in response to the crushing sanctions that the United States has imposed on Moscow over the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>The malware enabled the Russians to create “botnets” — networks of private computers that are infected with malicious software and controlled by the GRU, the intelligence arm of the Russian military. But it is unclear what the malware was intended to do, since it could be used for everything from surveillance to destructive attacks.</p> <p>A U.S. official said Wednesday that the United States did not want to wait to find out. Armed with secret court orders in the United States and the help of governments around the world, the Justice Department and the FBI disconnected the networks from the GRU's own controllers.</p> <p>“Fortunately, we were able to disrupt this botnet before it could be used,” Garland said.</p> <p>The court orders allowed the FBI to go into domestic corporate networks and remove the malware, sometimes without the company's knowledge.</p> <p>President Joe Biden has repeatedly said he would not put the U.S. military in direct conflict with the Russian military, a situation he has said could lead to World War III. That is why he refused to use the U.S. Air Force to create a no-fly zone over Ukraine or to permit the transfer of fighter jets to Ukraine from NATO air bases.</p> <p>But his hesitance does not appear to extend to cyberspace. The operation that was revealed Wednesday showed a willingness to disarm the main intelligence unit of the Russian military from computer networks inside the United States and around the world. It is also the latest effort by the Biden administration to frustrate Russian actions by making them public before Moscow can strike.</p> <p>Even as the United States works to prevent Russian attacks, some U.S. officials fear Putin may be biding his time in launching a major cyberoperation that could strike a blow at the American economy.</p> <p>Until now, U.S. officials say, the primary Russian cyberactions have been directed at Ukraine — including “wiper” malware designed to cripple Ukrainian government offices and an attack on a European satellite system called Viasat. The details of the satellite attack, one of the first of its kind, are of particular concern</p>

to the Pentagon and U.S. intelligence agencies, which fear it may have exposed vulnerabilities in critical communications systems that the Russians and others could exploit.

The Biden administration has instructed critical infrastructure companies in the United States to prepare to fend off Russian cyberattacks, and intelligence officials in Britain have echoed those warnings. And while Russian hackers have sometimes preferred to quietly infiltrate networks and gather information, researchers said that recent malware activity in Ukraine demonstrated Russia's increasing willingness to cause digital damage.

"They are engaged in a cyberwar there that is pretty intense, but it is targeted," said Tom Burt, a Microsoft executive who oversees the company's efforts to counter major cyberattacks and shut down an attack in Ukraine during the opening of the war.

Security experts suspect that Russia may be responsible for other cyberattacks that have occurred since the war began, including on Ukrainian communications services, although investigations into some of those attacks are ongoing.

In January, as diplomats from the United States prepared to meet with their Russian counterparts in an attempt to avoid military conflict in Ukraine, Russian hackers already were putting the finishing touches on a new piece of destructive malware.

The code was designed to delete data and render computer systems inoperable. In its wake, the malware left a note for victims, taunting them about losing information. Before U.S. and Russian representatives met for a final attempt at diplomacy, hackers had already begun using the malware to attack Ukrainian critical infrastructure, including government agencies responsible for food safety, finance and law enforcement.

Adam Meyers, the senior vice president for intelligence at CrowdStrike, who analyzed the malware used in the January attacks and linked the group to Russia, said the group intended to cause damage and aid Russian military objectives.

"It's a relatively new group, clearly purpose-built with a disruptive capability in mind," Meyers said. "The emergence of it is a progression of a continued demand from Russian forces for cyber operational support."

Another attack occurred Feb. 24, the day that Russia invaded Ukraine, when hackers knocked Viasat offline. The attack flooded modems with malicious traffic and disrupted internet services for several thousand people in Ukraine and tens of thousands of other customers across Europe, Viasat said in a statement. The attack also spilled over into Germany, disrupting operations of wind turbines there.

Viasat said that the hack remained under investigation by law enforcement, U.S. and international government officials and Mandiant, a cybersecurity firm that it hired to look into the matter, and it did not attribute the attack to Russia or any other state-backed group.

But senior U.S. officials said all evidence suggested Russia was responsible, and security researchers at SentinelOne said the malware used in the Viasat attack was similar to code that has been linked to the GRU. The United States has not formally named Russia as the source of the attack but is expected to do so as soon as several allies join in the analysis.

In late March, a cyberattack again disrupted communications services in Ukraine. This time, the attack focused on Ukrtelecom, a telephone and internet service provider, knocking the company's services offline for several hours. The attack was "an ongoing and intensifying nation-scale disruption to service, which is the most severe registered since the invasion by Russia," according to NetBlocks, a group that tracks internet outages.

Ukrainian officials believe that Russia was most likely responsible for the attack, which has not yet been traced to a particular hacking group.

“Russia was interested in cutting off communication between armed forces, between our troops, and that was partially successful in the very beginning of the war,” said Victor Zhora, a top official at Ukraine’s cybersecurity agency, the State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection. Ukrainian officials said Russia had also been behind attempts to spread disinformation about a surrender.

In the United States, officials fear similar cyberattacks could hit critical infrastructure companies. Some executives said they hoped the federal government would offer funding for cybersecurity.

“I am perfectly well aware that if Russia as a nation-state decided it wanted to attack the national infrastructure of the U.S., including what I’m responsible for, I don’t have much chance of stopping them,” said Peter Fletcher, the information security officer for the San Jose Water Co., which is part of a group that manages water services in several states. “The entire Russian nation-state versus Peter? I’m going to lose.”

Fletcher said that he was prepared but that smaller water companies than his own often struggled to keep up with cybersecurity demands. Many of them rely on outdated technology to pump and treat water, which could make them attractive hacking targets, he said.

Community Electric Cooperative, a utility provider that serves about 12,000 customers in Virginia, estimated that it needed \$50,000 to upgrade cybersecurity systems. The utility has already trained its staff on how to detect cyberattacks and has tested its systems, but representatives said the cooperative hoped to do even more in preparation for a potential cyberattack from Russia.

“If we don’t have the capabilities to prevent this stuff and we are the grid, it could be quite detrimental,” said Jessica Parr, Community Electric Cooperative’s communications director.

Despite the challenges, critical infrastructure providers said they were accustomed to handling disasters. “We deal with hurricanes and ice storms all year,” Parr said. “This is just a different type of storm.”

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	04/06 Amtrak asks TSA for watchlist screening
SOURCE	https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/Amtrak-asks-TSA-to-screen-passengers-against-17061494.php
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON – Khalid Turaani knows what it's like to be on a secret government watchlist.</p> <p>He learned about his status on it not from an official letter or communication, but when Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officers stopped him from flying one day in 2017.</p> <p>“They told me that I am on the no-fly list and that I cannot board that flight,” Turaani recalled in an interview.</p> <p>Results from a public records request he submitted that same year to the Department of Homeland Security confirmed – in writing – what he suspected: that his name had been assigned “no fly” status.</p> <p>With the help of an attorney at the Constitutional Law Center for Muslims in America, Turaani successfully challenged the designation through the formal redress process. In December 2017, DHS sent him a letter, writing that it had “made any corrections” including those “that may assist in avoiding incidents of misidentification” but never disclosed why Turaani had been on the list in the first place. He has not been blocked from flying since. The attorney working on his behalf shared those documents with Hearst Television.</p>

"So much harassment," Turaani said. "And it was it was really frustrating. And to tell you the truth, it was also humiliating."

Amtrak to screen passengers against watchlist

Soon, more people may find themselves ensnared by the same screening.

Amtrak has asked the TSA to start screening some of its passengers against the Terrorist Screening Database watchlist maintained by the Threat Screening Center to see if known or suspected terrorists have been riding the rails, according to a U.S. Department of Homeland Security privacy impact document obtained by the Hearst Television National Investigative Unit.

The program, part of the Amtrak Rail Passenger Threat Assessment and which has not been previously reported, would compare personal passenger information from Amtrak – which may also later include a traveler's "publicly available social media" profiles viewed by DHS personnel – to the government's terrorist screening database.

If the TSA finds any matches, the agency would then provide Amtrak with statistical and anonymized results that would not include passenger names, at least for this initial stage.

Currently, airline passengers can opt out of watchlist screening by choosing not to fly. But Amtrak passengers apparently will not have that option because the screening will initially use "several months" of past travel on the busy Northeast Corridor, according to the threat assessment privacy document. A spokesperson did not respond to a question about whether passengers will be able to ask Amtrak to exclude past travel from the new screening.

Amtrak routes go through 46 of the 50 states. New York had the country's highest ridership with people getting on and off Amtrak trains in the state more than 13 million times in 2019, according to the latest figures from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics. The Albany-Rensselaer station was the ninth busiest nationwide with passengers entering and exiting Amtrak trains there more than 800,000 times that year.

'It's terrifying to me'

The details of the plan are laid out in a 12-page Privacy Impact Assessment. As it notes, the 9/11 Commission report stated that while aviation remains a possible target, "opportunities to do harm are as great, or greater, in maritime or surface transportation." Congress raised the possibility of a security watchlist program for Amtrak as far back as 2007, and again suggested a vetting system more than decade later, the DHS document also notes. In 2020, just before the coronavirus pandemic began, Amtrak said it was assigning more police officers onboard its trains after a spike in crime.

The new watchlist screening program, however, is raising alarm among civil liberties advocates, who say it compromises too much liberty in the name of increasing safety.

"It's terrifying to me," said Saira Hussain, a staff attorney at the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), who learned about the new program from the National Investigative Unit.

In the Privacy Impact Assessment, DHS acknowledges that mistakes and wrong matches are possible, disclosing "there is a risk that limited information provided by Amtrak will result in inaccurate watchlist match results."

The assessment goes on to assert that incorrect matches will have "no impact" on individual passengers' privacy because only past travel records will be used and only statistical, or anonymized, results will be given to Amtrak. That means no passengers who are positive for a watchlist match will have their identities turned over to Amtrak. The limitation would be in place for at least in the initial phase of the program. But even then, the impact on travelers could go beyond TSA or Amtrak.

In the same document, DHS notes that the information gathered could be used for other purposes, including that potential and confirmed matches may be shared “with other law enforcement agencies pursuant to established routine uses.”

Hussain said in an interview she “absolutely” worries about the effect of mistakes on individuals.

“It can increase the chances of them facing some really negative outcomes when it comes to a contact with law enforcement. Should they be stopped for, you know, for like a broken tail light or something like that,” she said.

‘Mission creep’

“It’s a classic example of mission creep,” said Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) who reviewed the document at Hearst’s request.

“Pretty soon we’re going to have people walking through, you know, body scanners to go to a Little League game,” Stanley said in an interview. “We don’t want to turn America into an airport.”

The TSA declined a request for an interview about the program, as did Amtrak. America’s largest passenger railroad also did not respond to a detailed list of questions about the soon-to-be-implemented screening of some of its passengers.

The DHS document detailing the existence of the program states the new rail passenger screening will begin once Amtrak discloses it to passengers in its online privacy policy. At the time of this report, that webpage had not been updated since November. The data collected will be retained for two years, the document says.

Khalid Turaani, who successfully challenged his inclusion in a watchlist, said he does “understand the security needs, without a doubt,” for transportation security.

However, his past experience with passenger watchlist screening prompted a warning to his fellow travelers: “There must be some transparency measures and I believe that is going to be key.”

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HEADLINE	04/06 Court blocks disclosure terrorist screening
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/court-blocks-disclosure-immigration-docs-aimed-weeding-out-terrorists-2022-04-06/
GIST	<p>(Reuters) - A U.S. appeals court on Wednesday said federal agencies properly withheld documents related to how they vet applicants for immigration benefits with the aim of uncovering possible terrorist ties, reversing a judge who ordered their disclosure.</p> <p>A 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel said portions of a U.S. Department of State field manual on reviewing visa applications, and model questions U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services officers can ask applicants, were created for law enforcement purposes and are shielded from disclosure under the federal Freedom of Information Act.</p> <p>The unanimous three-judge panel rejected claims by the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University that the documents mainly served an administrative purpose and did not relate directly to law enforcement strategies.</p> <p>The Knight Institute sued to force disclosure of a trove of documents in 2017, after former Republican President Donald Trump issued a pair of executive orders directing the agencies to develop a more robust program for vetting immigrants entering the country for terrorist activity.</p> <p>The Knight Institute said the agencies adopted policies that were overly broad and appeared to exclude individuals from the U.S. based on their speech, beliefs, or associations.</p>

Return to Top	<p>The State Department, USCIS and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement turned over hundreds of pages of documents but withheld others, saying they included sensitive information on law enforcement investigation techniques.</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Andrew Carter in Manhattan last year disagreed, saying the field manual was merely a policy document that included descriptions of existing laws and regulations. The questions USCIS asks immigrants were not "special or technical" and individual applicants learned the questions during interviews, he said.</p> <p>But the 2nd Circuit on Wednesday said FOIA does not require that documents related to law enforcement be special or technical to be withheld. And the State Department had shown that disclosure of the field manual could aid immigrants in circumventing the law, the court said.</p> <p>Carrie DeCell, a senior staff attorney at the Knight First Amendment Institute, said in a statement the decision allows the government to continue to obscure practices with profound impacts on freedom of speech in the United States.</p> <p>"The government should not be conducting ideological screening tests for visitors whose views we are constitutionally entitled to hear," she said.</p> <p>USCIS and the State Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>The case is Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University v. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, No. 20-3837.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Al-Shabab: no plan attack Somali leaders
SOURCE	https://allafrica.com/stories/202204060626.html
GIST	<p>MOGADISHU - The al-Qaeda-allied al-Shabab militant group has dismissed reports that it was planning an attack against the Somali president and prime minister.</p> <p>Pro-al-Shabab Somali Memo website quoted an unnamed senior al-Shabab commander who termed the claim by the Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency (Nisa) "laughable".</p> <p>The Shabab commander said Nisa was "not capable" of unearthing the group's operations.</p> <p>The militants claimed the statement from the spy agency "indicates an imminent threat" against some officials because of political disputes.</p> <p>"Although the leaders and the officials of the apostate (Somali government) are always our targets, we will not allow them to involve us in their disputes," the jihadist commander was quoted as saying.</p> <p>The group also denied the existence of a senior al-Shabab operative named Mohamed Mahir, who Nisa said was leading the alleged attack plot.</p> <p>Somalia's security situation continues to be jeopardized by political wrangles over its delayed election.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Unrepentant: 20yr-sentence; try to join ISIS
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/man-sentenced-to-20-years-for-trying-to-join-isis-testified-he-would-again-seek-to-join-isis-if-acquitted/
GIST	<p>A California man was sentenced today to 20 years in prison for attempting to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, aka ISIS.</p>

Bernard Raymond Augustine, 25, of Keyes, was convicted by a federal jury after a one-week trial in August 2021.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, in February 2016, Augustine traveled from San Francisco to Northern Africa with the goal of joining ISIS. After arriving in Tunisia, Augustine was detained by local authorities before he could make it to ISIS-controlled territory across the border in Libya. He was returned to the United States in 2018 and prosecuted in the Eastern District of New York.

In the months leading up to his travel, Augustine watched ISIS propaganda, including videos glorifying ISIS's violence, such as "The Flames of War." He conducted internet searches for, among other things, "how to safely join ISIS," and reviewed websites related to ISIS recruitment practices, including one titled, "How does a Westerner join ISIS? Is there a recruitment or application process?" Augustine also posted numerous statements in support of ISIS and violent extremism, such as "the Islamic State is the true Islam," "Muslims who leave the west . . . answer the call for the struggle, and march until they are victorious or martyred are the true believers," and the ISIS caliphate "can't be established and maintained except through the blood of the mujahideen who practice the true belief."

The defendant represented himself at trial and testified that he maintained his interest in supporting ISIS. Augustine testified that ISIS videos of members executing Syrian captives and beheadings were "good" and "really cool." He admitted that one way he intended to provide material support to ISIS was to participate in ISIS propaganda videos by providing the necessary English-language voice over. When asked to confirm his testimony that he "would do it all again and would go back today," Augustine responded, "No, tomorrow, when they let me off."

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	04/06 Small airports on shaky flight path
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/04/06/regional-airport-flights-commercial-service/
GIST	<p>MONTOURSVILLE, Pa. — The ticket counters at Williamsport Regional Airport's new multimillion-dollar terminal these days are bare. Security checkpoints sit idle, locked behind a silver gate that seals off the boarding area. Two rental car counters are sporadically staffed.</p> <p>Travelers who once pulled their suitcases across the airport's sand-colored tiles inlaid with blue — a nod to the nearby Susquehanna River — now drive at least an hour to catch a flight. The terminal offers free parking, an on-site travel agency and a cafe that serves made-from-scratch breakfast dishes, but what it doesn't provide is commercial air service.</p> <p>Williamsport is perhaps best known as home of the annual Little League World Series that draws tens of thousands of fans every year and fills both the city's coffers and its airport. But getting to this north-central Pennsylvania hub became more difficult after the last commercial flight departed in October. Williamsport Regional is among dozens of mostly rural airports to lose service during the pandemic, the result of slashed routes, a pilot shortage and rising fuel costs in an industry where economics place the highest burdens on the smallest markets.</p> <p>Even in the best of times, it was difficult for small airports to maintain or grow air service when more passengers equals more revenue. As carriers are emerging from the pandemic, that math has become increasingly challenging. Nearly 1 in 5 flights scheduled in 2019 were no longer operating in 2021, according to the Regional Airline Association. It was a toll that hit hardest in places like Williamsport.</p> <p>"It's been a nightmare for us," said Jason Fink, chief executive of the Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber of Commerce. "We definitely need air service in this market."</p>

The loss of commercial flights comes as small communities increasingly are struggling to maintain services, such as quality health care, amid population declines. In Williamsport, which Census figures show lost 1,600 residents in the past decade, leaders fear the lack of air service could have a snowball effect, making it more difficult to keep businesses and to attract new employers to a town built by the lumber industry.

It's a sentiment being echoed in dozens of communities across the country. Airports in Twin Falls, Idaho; Pierre, S.D.; and Binghamton, N.Y. — places where once-robust air service has nearly evaporated — sometimes operate a single flight a day.

"Airlines fly for profit, not pride," said aviation analyst Henry Harteveldt, president of [Atmosphere Research Group](#). "And smaller towns are increasingly falling by the wayside."

Small cities 'hit first and worst'

The cost of jet fuel has more than doubled in the past year. Airlines are struggling to replace more than 5,000 pilots who left the industry during the pandemic. Meanwhile, competition for captains, first officers and other crew members is pushing up salaries, increasingly making service to small towns like Williamsport, (population 27,754) less lucrative.

"When an airline looks at the economics of a route, smaller communities are going to bear the brunt of" any cuts, said Jeff Pelletier, managing director of [Airline Data Inc.](#) "There's a finite number of pilots and a finite number of aircraft. Carriers can only do so much."

Federal programs keep some small airports connected to the nation's air system, but the pandemic has helped to dismantle service at others.

The Transportation Department's Essential Air Service subsidizes flights to areas that otherwise might not be served. The department has used [another program](#) to award more than \$200 million since 2002 to help small communities grow air service — money often dangled before air carriers to lure them to a new market. As part of a [coronavirus](#) relief package in December 2020, an additional \$5 million was added to the program to help ailing airports. Jurisdictions where service was lost or reduced during the pandemic were given priority, although the health crisis is only the latest sting for airports struggling to compete.

When the airline industry was deregulated in 1978, it opened the door for carriers to decide what cities they wanted to service and what they wanted to charge. Congress created programs to ensure smaller communities weren't left behind, but those were never meant to last forever, said William Swelbar, chief industry analyst at [The Swelbar-Zhong Consultancy](#), a commercial-aviation analysis and research company.

Road improvements have also simplified driving longer distances. Southwest Airlines' business model showed people would drive to more-distant airports for reliable service and cheaper fares, Swelbar said.

Analysts agree it's important to keep small communities connected to the world. Those connections were once made with planes carrying nine to 19 passengers. Even some of the 50-seat aircraft that airlines increasingly shifted to over the past few years are being upsized to 75 seats or more, which many communities don't have the population to support, analysts say.

"The number of small community airports with commercial service was always going to decline as aircraft became larger," Swelbar said.

Faye Malarkey Black is president of the Regional Airline Association, which advocates for the nation's smaller airlines — often a critical link between smaller and larger airports. She said she's increasingly worried about how the pandemic and a scarcity of pilots will upend smaller airlines and airports.

“They always get hit first and worst,” she said of communities like Williamsport; Macon, Ga. and Cody, Wyo. About two-thirds of U.S. airports with passenger service are served only by regional airlines, which tend to offer shorter flights that connect to larger hub airports.

According to the RAA, air service to small communities provides more than 1 million jobs and more than \$41 billion in wages and tax revenue. In 2019, small carriers delivered 42 million passengers to mainline carrier flights.

During the Great Recession around 2008, 23 airports lost all commercial service, according to Stacey Mumbower, an assistant professor of management and technology in the College of Business at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Smaller communities lost more than 31 percent of their departures, and at a rate that was five times greater than losses at larger airports, according to an RAA analysis.

The pandemic-related downturn is further accelerating declines.

In 2009, more than three-quarters of the nation’s airports were served only by regional carriers, a number that has fallen to 66 percent as fewer communities are being served overall, Black said. Her organization found that total scheduled regional departures declined 22 percent from 2019 to 2021.

Theodore Alter, a professor of agriculture, environment and regional economics, and co-director for the Center for Economic and Community Development at Pennsylvania State University, said less-populated areas are on a path of continued decline unless national priorities change to help stem the tide.

“When it comes to essential services like regional air travel, the post office and Postal Service, what are we willing to do as a society to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to be enfranchised and participate in our society?” he said.

Williamsport’s search for reliable service

Williamsport, which local historians say once was home to [more millionaires per capita](#) than any other U.S. city, is no stranger to the ups and downs of the aviation industry.

In the 1980s, it offered more than 20 daily flights as more than 100,000 passengers moved through annually, said Tom Hart, who managed the airport for nearly 33 years. By 1990, passenger counts dropped to 48,700. The airport was down to a single carrier flying to one destination in 2019, serving 20,400 passengers.

As counts tumbled, airport officials hatched a plan for a new terminal to make Williamsport more attractive to other carriers.

Rather than remodel the two-story building that opened in 1948, officials raised more than \$16 million in federal, state and local funds to build an airport with high-speed wireless, an expanded boarding area with seats that have charging ports, restrooms outfitted with no-touch faucets and paper towel dispensers, and a spacious security area that can be expanded.

Even on gray days, sunlight spills into Williamsport Regional’s lobby. Wide windows offer expansive views of the airfield and hills. Inside the secure area, a TSA officer on a recent day wiped down equipment, saying he looked forward to screening passengers again.

“Do you want me to drop a pin?” quipped Richard Howell, the airport’s executive director, as he guided a pair of visitors through the empty terminal.

In his modest office with windows overlooking the parking lot where the old terminal once stood, Howell spends his days trying to persuade an airline to take a chance on the two-gate airport. He’s got a \$950,000 incentive to offer, courtesy of a federal grant, but no takers.

“This market demonstrated itself even through thick and thin,” Howell said. “It’s proven itself, that it could make money. It’s not a marginal market. It doesn’t necessarily need government subsidies to make itself profitable. It just needs a reliable carrier.”

American Airlines, the nation’s largest air carrier, said that even before the pandemic, the service wasn’t meeting financial expectations. Williamsport was one of 15 cities that American severed ties with when federal pandemic relief money temporarily ran out in 2020. Service to those communities was restored when additional pandemic relief funds were approved, but in Williamsport, it didn’t last long.

“Our regional portfolio is very important,” American said in a statement to The Washington Post. “We certainly rely on our regional operators to feed our hubs but in a world right now where we are constrained, we’ve had to cut service to some small cities.”

American noted it continues to offer service in State College and Harrisburg, about 65 and 95 miles away, respectively, from Williamsport.

For the region’s largest health care provider, the lack of flights could harm recruiting efforts and the hospital’s mission of providing quality medical care, said Patricia L. Jackson-Gehris, chief operating officer of UPMC North Central Pennsylvania.

“High-level specialty surgeons that come on a travel basis, we don’t have an easy way for them to get in and get out,” said Jackson-Gehris, who also is president of UPMC Williamsport. “We can’t have them driving seven hours a day to do surgeries.”

About 120 miles northeast of Williamsport, Mark Heefner has a \$1 million federal grant he hoped would lure more air service to Greater Binghamton Airport. Delta Air Lines once offered three daily flights to Detroit but is down to one. Still, Heefner, the airport’s commissioner of aviation, is lobbying for a second carrier that would fly to Dulles International Airport outside Washington.

Heefner said he can’t compete with bigger airports, but that shouldn’t mean small communities like his are left behind.

“We don’t speak for as many, but that doesn’t make us any less important,” he said.

More cities becoming unconnected

Howell, who managed airports in California and Georgia, said he knows what his community is up against. An airline could make money flying from Williamsport, but it might make more flying somewhere else.

In the meantime, general-aviation flights operate at Williamsport, as do tenants that offer services to private aircraft. The Pennsylvania College of Technology’s aviation program is nearby.

The airport is still a community gathering spot. The Rotary Club meets every week in the sunny board room. It also hosts events for the Civil Air Patrol and the Lions Club.

At least three days a week, a steady stream of people enjoy breakfast and lunch at the airport’s lone dining option. On Thursdays, longtime patrons of Tracey Bartholomew’s cafe consume her made-from-scratch dishes, helping to fill the seats. On Fridays, it’s a local yoga group.

On a recent day over lunch, Tom Nau, 82, and his dining companions, Susan Stopper, 70; Victoria Muhs, 68; and Kim Painter, 58, recalled the energy that once filled Williamsport Regional, ticking off a list of cities they would like to visit.

“It’s just the four of us and look at all the places we’d like to go,” said Stopper. “Imagine if you asked other people in the county?”

That's part of what sets Williamsport apart from other airports, said Fink, the chamber of commerce official: The airport is also a gathering place. Pelletier, the Airline Data Inc. managing director, said there is hope for airports like Williamsport that have strong community support.

Meanwhile, Howell and other community boosters are optimistic that despite the odds, a carrier will see the value in a city that continues to evolve and reinvent itself. Critical to that transformation, he said, is reliable commercial air service close to home.

"We just can't lose that connection to the rest of the world," Sen. Robert P. Casey Jr. (D-Pa.) said during a recent visit to the area. "In some ways, it's like a bridge that if it falls down, the alternate route is never commensurate with their equivalent to what you have now."

With the industry still in transition during the pandemic, it's not clear if cuts at smaller airports will be permanent.

Delta Air Lines President Glen Hauenstein said earlier this year the carrier had reduced flights to smaller markets by 20 to 25 percent and exited a "handful of markets" because of the pilot shortage. He said he hoped the airline could restore some routes later this year.

United Airlines chief executive Scott Kirby told lawmakers at a December hearing he didn't expect the outlook to improve in 2022. "We'll see where we go in 2023."

Kirby said the carrier reduced shorter routes and grounded about 100 regional aircraft, a move he attributed largely to the pilot shortage.

"There are places that have fewer flights and there are unfortunately places that have no flights," he said. "There will be communities that unfortunately don't have United service in the future, and there will be communities that have fewer flights, and there will be communities that have fewer flights with bigger aircraft."

"And that's kind of the outlook."

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HEADLINE	04/06 Sea lions move into Seattle Shilshole Bay
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/sea-lions-move-into-shilshole-bay-in-seattle
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Sea lions have claimed the waters of Shilshole Bay in Seattle, and it is bringing out people from all over to gawk at the massive marine mammals.</p> <p>Over the last few months, sea lions can be seen and heard in Shilshole Bay. People will line the dock next to Ray's Boathouse to watch the plump pinnipeds.</p> <p>"It's funny because they're on the 55-gallon drum breakwater there and one of them will get on the wrong way and high side them, and they all fall off. And they'll all just go crazy, trying to get back on, making all sorts of noise; it's comical," said Doug Zellers, co-owner of Ray's Boathouse.</p> <p>Michael Milstein with NOAA Fisheries says there is no specific reason why the sea lions are laying claim to this area, but he says they will not be around long.</p> <p>Milstein says the sea lions arrived around December, and have spent the last few months bulking up, before they will head toward Southern California to mate.</p> <p>He says they will most likely leave the waters of Shilshole Bay by late spring.</p> <p>For some people, the sea lions' departure is welcomed. Milstein says neighbors have complained about the constant noise from the animals.</p>

	<p>However, Zellers, who also lives near the area, says he has gotten used to his new neighbors and enjoys being able to see these animals so close.</p> <p>"It tunes into background noise after a while," he said. "It's fun to watch," Zellers added.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 WA new 10,000 acre 'carbon reserve'
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/wa-to-preserve-10000-acres-of-trees-to-sell-as-carbon-credits-to-polluters/
GIST	<p>ECHO SYSTEM TIMBER SALE, King County — When it fell into this rich soil and sprouted, Washington was not yet a state. The seedling sank its root deep, and grew taller and taller as its first century of life rolled right on into another.</p> <p>Alan Mainwaring, wildlife biologist for the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, ran a tape around the tree's mighty trunk and measured nearly 54 inches. The tree talked back, its wood squeaking, as he drove a borer into the tree and withdrew a slender core, then counted its rings. At about 144 years old and 190 feet high, this Douglas fir sized up as prime timber on state lands in this forest within earshot of I-90 that normally could be cut and sold for lumber.</p> <p>But under a new policy announced Wednesday by Hilary Franz, Washington commissioner of public lands, this fir will instead be preserved, as part of the state's new, 10,000-acre "carbon reserve."</p> <p>The state intends to lease the trees as carbon credits to emitters of greenhouse gases that cause global warming. The DNR is partnering with Finite Carbon, a developer and supplier of carbon offsets, which will verify the effectiveness of the offsets.</p> <p>Purchasers are expected to be larger corporations seeking to achieve reductions in their carbon emissions, said Franz, adding that in the first 10 years of the program, the DNR hopes to sell 900,000 credits reducing carbon emissions to the atmosphere by the equivalent of 2 billion vehicle miles traveled.</p> <p>Money from the leases in these forests will compensate beneficiaries of state trust lands, including the state school construction fund, and money for hospital districts, library districts and more.</p> <p>In addition to the 840,000 acres of DNR-managed trust land designated for conservation, the 10,000-acre carbon reserve adds a bit more acreage off-limits to harvest, about 0.5% of the state's forested trust lands. But as climate change threatens the planet, these trees are more valuable living than as lumber, said Franz, who announced the carbon reserve at a news conference at the Capitol State Forest on Wednesday.</p> <p>Sequestering carbon dioxide, a heat-trapping gas, in trees which use it as food to grow, helps blunt the worst effects of climate change. Globally, forests absorb about a third of all the carbon emissions annually from the burning of fossil fuels.</p> <p>As scientists increasingly warn climate change threatens the planet, "I have a big belief that with climate change here, we need to save our forests to truly save ourselves," Franz said</p> <p>"The most sustainable environmental thing we can do is increase the number of acres of land in forests, both natural and working forests, and we have very, very little time left to save both."</p> <p>Franz said the new carbon reserve is the result of a commitment she made a year ago to step back from harvest of the state's older forests to assess their value for biodiversity, climate and more.</p> <p>The DNR has come under increasing criticism for harvesting such trees, which are not protected under its old-growth policy but nonetheless have high ecological value.</p>

The reserve is being phased in. A total of 3,750 acres is being set aside now, with the balance yet to be identified for preservation in phase two. Under a commissioner's order, 10,000 acres in all will be set aside in areas available for lease only for the purposes of carbon storage, and generating revenue for state trust beneficiaries through carbon markets.

The program in Washington is launching with protection of forests in Whatcom, Thurston, King and Grays Harbor counties.

DNR trust lands generate about \$180 million a year for schools and counties across the state.

By diversifying revenue streams beyond harvest to include carbon leases, the trusts could actually come out ahead, with revenues generated with greater financial stability and certainty, Franz said.

She predicted the carbon leases would generate tens of millions of dollars for schools, colleges and local services that state trust lands support.

Forests may be selected for the reserve for a range of reasons, including significant concentration of biodiversity; presence of rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems and habitats; watershed protection and erosion control; and resources or areas fundamental to basic needs and cultural identities of Indigenous people and local communities.

In that way, the new policy provides a broader palette for conservation beyond just the age of a tree.

The policy already is drawing strong reactions.

Peter Goldman, director and managing attorney of the nonprofit Washington Forest Law Center, called the reserve "green lipstick on a pig" because it sets some state lands aside for conservation while other state legacy forests are still being cut down.

"It's great, who could be against it," he said of the reserve. "But is she just trying to pour cold water on the political heat she is taking on these sales?"

He and others said they were surprised by the policy because Conservation Northwest, the Washington Environmental Council and other plaintiffs have taken a lawsuit all the way to the State Supreme Court to argue the DNR has the authority to consider values beyond dollars when determining management of state lands not only for trust beneficiaries, but for all the people of Washington. A decision on the case is expected any time.

Rachel Baker, forest program director for the WEC, said the carbon project shows it is both possible and necessary to manage state forest lands for multiple benefits, "like we have been saying all along.

"We welcome DNR taking this step forward."

However that step is small, she noted: 10,000 acres is about 0.5% of DNR's forested trust lands. "It's a good thing, but it leaves us interested in what DNR is doing with the remaining 1.99 million acres," Baker said. "We would love to see DNR use this as a jumping-off point and managing state lands holistically for climate."

In a statement released Tuesday night, Travis Joseph of the American Forest Resource Council, a forest industry trade association, said the reserve is too much in addition to other policies already in place to conserve forests that put nearly half of DNR trust lands in Western Washington off-limits to harvest.

"We are concerned that Commissioner Franz is moving forward with no analysis or recognition of the consequences to link the future of the Department, Washington's forest workers ... and our public forests to complex and controversial financial markets with uncertain environmental outcomes," Joseph stated.

As the people carry on, so do the trees.

The big Douglas fir on the Echo System sale is hitting its stride as it surges into its second century — just the beginning for a magnificent species such as Doug fir, which can live 800 years or longer, Mainwaring noted.

This forest sprouted after a fire in 1790. It was logged in 1850 by hand, with the logs dragged out by teams of oxen. Lots of trees were left behind. That set the stage for what is on the land today; 140- to 160-year-old Douglas fir, western hemlock and western red cedar.

Here and there are trees sprouted from blackened stumps: reminders of the 1790 fire.

It's a place rich with wildlife.

A trunk was bare in the spot where a black-tailed deer had recently rubbed the velvet off its antler. Trees were chiseled by woodpeckers seeking grubs, the wood chips in a yellow scatter all over the ground. The canopy was growing into the cover favored by flying squirrels.

Fallen logs and blowdown were rotting into the debris that feeds the soil and next generation of trees. The understory was a tangle of salal, huckleberry and ferns. Spring's first trillium shone white in the shadowy forest floor.

It's not an old-growth forest. "We cut too much old growth," Mainwaring said. In many places, "This is the best of what we've got left."

He packed up his coring equipment, and gave the tree's thick, mossy bark a pat as he headed out of the woods. "You are just a youngster," he said. "No offense, you are beautiful. But still, just a young tree."

That now, will get to become old.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Seattle dog poop problem: 2nd worst in US
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/puget-sound/seattle-loves-dogs-but-not-picking-up-after-them/
GIST	<p>With more than a million dog owners in Seattle, the city consistently ranks among the most pooch-friendly metropolises in the nation. But some irksome concerns come along with that love.</p> <p>Among them: Seattle has been named the second-worst city in the country when it comes to complaints about dog poop on Twitter, according to pet insurance web company Protect My Paws. The company released the report in honor of International Pooper Scooper Week at the beginning of this month.</p> <p>The tribute week was added to the calendar by a trade association for professional pet-waste workers, and is intended to "recognize a year-round problem" by educating owners on the importance of cleaning up after their dogs in a nation with 71 million pet dogs producing an estimated 4.4 billion pounds of waste annually.</p> <p>The problem is a regional one, and other Puget Sound cities are having their own battles over it. Three years ago, Kirkland launched a campaign to encourage more residents to scoop their dogs' poop by cataloging sites where unscooped animal waste was found and marking them with flags.</p> <p>Over a three-week period, the city documented more than 250 "findings" at Juanita Beach Park and Hazen Hills Park, and for a time, hundreds of yellow flags dotted the parks' green fields.</p> <p>"The flags show that it's not just your dog doing this," Aaron Hussmann, Kirkland's environmental education and outreach specialist, told The Seattle Times in 2019. "And it shows that someone is watching."</p>

In Seattle parks, the problem persists but is getting no worse, despite what the city's pet-waste rankings may suggest, according to Rachel Schulkin, a spokesperson for Seattle Parks and Recreation.

"Is there occasional poop? Yeah, but it hasn't risen to the level of something that needs to be dealt with," Schulkin said. She said picking up poop, along with emptying trash bins and cleaning bathrooms is simply part of the city's routine park maintenance.

She acknowledges, however, that things could look a little grimmer out on the sidewalks and parking strips, where she sees evidence that folks aren't picking up after their pets "all the time."

From the city's perspective, the bigger problem with dogs is the number that go unleashed, or play on ballfields, play fields and shores.

"Off-leash dogs are everywhere and that continues to be a major struggle for us," Schulkin said.

Dogs should never go onto ball fields, beaches and play areas, because even when owners clean up after them there, fecal material remains behind.

"Then later that afternoon there's soccer practice and kids are sliding around on the field and that is not OK," she said. "People think they are the only ones who are doing it and they are not."

The city has [more than a dozen off-leash parks](#). Please use them, Schulkin said.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	04/06 German police raid neo-Nazi cells; arrests
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/06/german-police-raid-neo-nazi-cells-across-country
GIST	<p>German authorities have swooped on alleged neo-Nazi militant cells and arrested four suspects as the country pursues a forceful crackdown on far-right extremists.</p> <p>In what Der Spiegel magazine called "the biggest blow against the militant neo-Nazi scene in the recent past", the federal prosecutor's office said more than 1,000 officers had raided the homes of 50 suspects in 11 states.</p> <p>"The four men arrested are accused of membership of a rightwing extremist criminal organisation," it said in a statement, adding that some had also received other charges, including grievous bodily harm.</p> <p>Spiegel reported that one of the suspects was a non-commissioned officer in the German armed forces.</p> <p>The suspects targeted on Wednesday were believed to belong to the far-right martial arts group Knockout 51, the banned Combat 18, named after the order in the alphabet of Adolf Hitler's initials, the US-based Atomwaffen Division or the online propaganda group Sonderkommando 1418.</p> <p>Germany's centre-left-led government under chancellor Olaf Scholz took office in December pledging a decisive fight against far-right militants after criticism that the previous administration had been lax on neo-Nazi violence.</p> <p>Nancy Faeser, Germany's first woman interior minister, said when she was appointed that her top priority would be tackling the country's "biggest threat: rightwing extremism" after a series of deadly far-right attacks.</p>

	<p>“Our significantly stepped-up efforts against violent rightwing extremists are bearing fruit,” she said in a statement on Wednesday. “Today’s measures show again that outlawing groups can be a mighty sword in defence of our basic democratic order.”</p> <p>Three of the men were detained in the eastern town of Eisenach. The fourth was picked up in Rotenburg an der Fulda in central Germany.</p> <p>The three men arrested in Eisenach are believed to be leading figures in Knockout 51, which prosecutors said “lures young, nationalist-minded men, indoctrinates them with rightwing extremist propaganda and trains them for street fighting”.</p> <p>Knockout 51 is believed to have ties with other far-right groups across Germany, and “at the latest since March 2020, has been focused on committing serious crimes”.</p> <p>These include attacks on leftwing activists, the police and “other people that according to the rightwing extremist and racist world view of the group can be fought”.</p> <p>It said Knockout 51 tried to establish a “Nazi quarter” under its control in Eisenach and last year began conducting “patrols” in which they tried to provoke victims into fighting them. Prosecutors said the suspects injured several people, some of them seriously, in such confrontations.</p> <p>The group is also accused of attending protests against government coronavirus restrictions between August 2020 and March 2021 with the aim of provoking clashes with police and counterdemonstrators.</p> <p>Prosecutors said 10 of the suspects targeted on Wednesday were accused of ties with the “terrorist organisation” Atomwaffen Division Deutschland. The German arm of a “racist, anti-Semitic and National Socialist” militant group formed in the United States in 2015, “its aim is to unleash a ‘race war’ in which the ‘white population’ is to emerge victorious”.</p> <p>It said the group had tried to recruit young German men at universities in Berlin and Frankfurt with flyers and internet propaganda.</p> <p>Sonderkommando 1418 has operated mainly as an online chat group to draw supporters for the establishment of a “neo-fascist system”.</p> <p>Federal prosecutors this week reported a breakthrough in the inquiry into a 30-year-old deadly arson attack against a shelter for asylum-seekers with the arrest of a far-right suspect in the western city of Saarlouis.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Turkey: Khashoggi murder trial to Saudis
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/07/world/middleeast/khashoggi-murder-trial-turkey-saudi-arabia.html
GIST	<p>ISTANBUL — A court in Turkey transferred the trial in the murder of the Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi to Saudi Arabia on Thursday, a move almost certain to end the last case that held out hope of serving some measure of justice for a heinous crime that drew global outrage.</p> <p>The Turkish decision was a blow to human rights advocates who had hoped the trial in Turkey would at least make public more evidence of who was involved and how Mr. Khashoggi was killed and dismembered by a Saudi hit squad in 2018 inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, where he had gone to get paperwork he needed to marry his Turkish fiancée, Hatice Cengiz.</p> <p>“Let’s not entrust the lamb to the wolf,” Ali Ceylan, a lawyer for Ms. Cengiz, told the court on Thursday before the decision was announced. “Let’s protect the dignity and honor of the Turkish nation, and let’s not make such a decision.”</p>

Mr. Ceylan reminded the court that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other Turkish officials had said that justice did not exist in Saudi Arabia.

Gokmen Baspinar, another lawyer for Ms. Cengiz, told the court that Saudi Arabia's trial of suspects in the case was already over and that many of the defendants in the Turkish trial had been acquitted there.

"It would be irresponsible for the Turkish nation to transfer the case to a country with no justice," Mr. Baspinar said.

The decision coincided with efforts by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey to improve his country's relationship with Saudi Arabia. Last week, the Turkish foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, said in a televised interview that "concrete steps" were on the way to mend ties with the Arab world's richest state.

The chief of a panel of judges announced the decision in the courtroom, granting a request last week by the prosecutor to transfer the case because none of the 26 Saudi suspects on trial were in Turkish custody. Turkey's justice minister endorsed the prosecutor's request.

The Turkish trial, which opened in 2020, was largely symbolic because Saudi Arabia had refused to extradite the suspects and Turkish law does not allow convictions of people who have not testified.

Mr. Khashoggi was a prominent journalist who fell out with his government and moved to the United States, where he wrote columns for The Washington Post that were critical of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his plans to remake the kingdom. Mr. Khashoggi's body has never been found.

Prince Mohammed has insisted he knew nothing of the murder plot in advance. However, the C.I.A. concluded that he had greenlighted the operation to kill or capture Mr. Khashoggi.

Turkish authorities dribbled out details to keep the case in the spotlight, which, along with the murder, exacerbated longstanding tensions between Turkey and Saudi Arabia over Turkey's relationship with political Islamists in the Arab world and its support for the antigovernment uprisings of the Arab Spring, which Saudi Arabia largely opposed.

Saudi Arabia had imposed an unofficial boycott of Turkish goods, drastically reducing the flow of Turkish exports to Saudi Arabia, and Turkey has more recently suffered a significant financial crisis that has caused the value of its currency to plummet.

In 2019, Saudi Arabia sentenced five men to death and three to prison terms over Mr. Khashoggi's killing. The next year, the death sentences were changed to prison terms after one of Mr. Khashoggi's adult sons pardoned the killers.

That trial reinforced the Saudi narrative that Mr. Khashoggi's death was the result of a rogue operation without the oversight of top officials. The Saudis have never named the men who were sentenced, and a United Nations expert dismissed the trial as "the antithesis of justice."

In endorsing the case's transfer to Saudi Arabia last week, Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag said in a statement that the trial would continue in Saudi Arabia and that Turkey would wait to see convictions and sentences before dropping its own case.

But it appeared unlikely that Saudi Arabia would hear the case because Saudi officials have said they consider their trial the final word on the matter.

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HEADLINE	04/06 WSP: alarming rise road-rage shootings
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/washington-state-patrol-seeing-alarming-increase-in-road-rage-shootings

SEATTLE - Public safety is a growing concern for officers as gun violence and road rage incidents are both on the rise.

Over the years, gun violence and road rage have both increased, but it's when you combine the two that statistics are alarming.

On average, 44 people were shot and killed or hurt in road rage shootings nationwide in 2021, which is double the pre-pandemic average, according to [Everytown, a gun safety organization](#).

The most recent shooting occurred on April 2, when [two cars were speeding down Interstate-5 in Tukwila](#), shooting at each other. The shooting [ended with a crash into an uninvolved car](#). A backpack with an AK-47, AR-15 and a handgun was found after one of the shooters allegedly tried to get rid of it.

"We are thankful that no one else was struck and we're thankful that we got all three of the parties involved in custody," said Washington State Patrol spokesperson, Trooper Rick Johnson.

[Three suspects in their 20s were booked into King County Jail](#) in connection with that shooting. One of them appeared before a judge on Wednesday for what detectives believe is a gang-related shooting.

"The state is requesting bail set to \$250,000," A King County prosecutor was heard saying in court. "The defendant is extremely dangerous to the community."

All three will be charged with drive-by shooting and assault.

State troopers are saying it's a call they are responding to all too often now, and it's becoming a growing public safety concern.

Reports of road rage have increased significantly, not just in King County but nationwide.

AAA describes instances of road rage as:

- Cursing, rude or obscene gestures
- Throwing objects
- Sideswiping
- Forcing a driver off the road

Johnson says these cases are escalating.

"We're [up to 20 shootings this year](#), today. We were at 12 last year during the same timeframe," Johnson said.

The statistic only represents reported shooting along King County highways.

Last year, [at least 40 roadway shootings were reported](#) and, WSP is alarmed as we're already at that halfway point just three months into 2022.

"We don't want any shootings of course, but yes, we see this uptick and really can't explain why," Johnson said.

Everytown Research and Policy says road rage injuries and deaths have increased yearly since 2018, but 2021 was the worst year on record. The agency said on average, a person was shot, hurt or killed every 17 hours nationwide.

"We've all cut somebody off in our driving careers and the best thing I say is just give them a wave say, 'listen, sorry,' and don't do anything that's inciting because you don't know what the other person is capable of, unfortunately," Johnson said.

	Tonight, the investigation into the latest shooting is ongoing. However, WSP says they're out patrolling as these trends don't seem to be slowing.
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HEADLINE	04/06 Renton police copper wire theft arrests
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/renton-police-make-several-copper-wire-theft-arrests/NWUBE5URBBHABGYUBZ5MLKAFCI/
GIST	<p>RENTON, Wash. — Renton police said they made several arrests with “criminals going to extreme lengths to steal (copper) wire” over the past few days.</p> <p>On Saturday just before 10 a.m., officers were called to a construction site near the 300 block of Edmonds Avenue Southeast. A concerned resident called 911 after seeing two men taking copper cable from a Puget Sound Energy work site, police said.</p> <p>When police arrived, they found a 64-year-old man from Ravensdale and a 56-year-old man from Kent pulling a rope that was hooked to some copper power cable.</p> <p>Police said the cable had been cut between power towers, which was not an active power line. The cable was hung in a tree, where a 39-year-old Auburn man was seen with a climbing harness and a cordless saw, “apparently preparing to cut the cable free,” according to authorities.</p> <p>All three men were arrested for first-degree attempted theft.</p> <p>On the same day, police were called after 2:10 p.m. to the 2900 block of Southeast Royal Hills Drive for a report of a theft in progress.</p> <p>A resident in the area called 911 after seeing two men taking copper cable near Beacon Way Southeast, police said.</p> <p>When police arrived, they found two men, a 53-year-old SeaTac man and a 46-year-old Burien man, with chainsaws, reciprocating saws, ropes, and a generator.</p> <p>Police said the two men had cut six copper cables free from a Puget Sound Energy tower and were pulling some cables free from a tree with a rope.</p> <p>One of the men was arrested on a Department of Corrections warrant and the other was questioned and later released.</p> <p>Both men are facing second-degree theft charges, police said.</p> <p>The following morning, police said a 44-year-old man was found about 75 feet up a power line tower near the Brighton Ridge apartments after a resident called 911 to report a man was using a saw to take items from the tower.</p> <p>That man was booked into jail for theft after he attempted to hide a portable bandsaw some 50 feet up the tower, authorities said.</p> <p>Police said they arrested another man who was seen on Tuesday morning in a suspicious car in the area of Southeast Third Street and Edmonds Avenue Northeast.</p> <p>When police first arrived at the scene to question the man, they saw cordless saws and climbing harnesses in the car but could not arrest him because they did not have probable cause, officials said.</p> <p>However, the man had a felony warrant due to a weapons charge and was arrested.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Juvenile inmate briefly escapes facility
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/juvenile-inmate-briefly-escapes-from-echo-glen-childrens-center/281-2419af71-37fb-409e-a79c-ffa2b24d18d5
GIST	<p>SNOQUALMIE, Wash. —A juvenile inmate briefly escaped from Echo Glen Children's Center Wednesday night.</p> <p>The facility is a juvenile rehabilitation center that houses medium and maximum security younger male offenders and younger female offenders.</p> <p>The juvenile hopped the fence of the facility around 8:39 p.m., according to the King County Sheriff's Office (KCSO).</p> <p>A Washington State Patrol helicopter and a K9 unit were able to track the juvenile to the area of Borden Avenue and Ridge Street, according to KCSO. The juvenile was taken back into custody a little after 10 p.m.</p> <p>The juvenile will face additional charges for escaping the facility.</p> <p>The escape comes just over three months after five other juvenile inmates broke out of the center. The teens worked together to overpower Echo Glen staff and lock them in cells before they escaped in a stolen Ford Fusion.</p> <p>The teens escaped the facility on Jan. 26, and three were apprehended the next day. A fourth teen was caught on Feb. 1 and the last escapee was apprehended on March 15.</p> <p>The Department of Children, Youth and Families dispatched a Critical Incident Response Team to review the January escape, but a root cause has not yet been identified.</p> <p>The facility announced it would tighten security measures after the initial escape, including establishing a single point of entry, replacing the facility's video surveillance system, requiring maximum-security inmates to wear uniforms and increasing security on the grounds.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Judge acquits man for Capitol riot charges
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/man-who-testified-at-his-capitol-riot-trial-awaits-verdict/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge on Wednesday acquitted a New Mexico man of misdemeanor charges that he illegally entered the U.S. Capitol and engaged in disorderly conduct after he walked into the building during last year's riot.</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden issued the verdict from the bench after hearing testimony without a jury in the case against Matthew Martin. McFadden, who was nominated by former President Donald Trump, acquitted Martin of all four counts for which he was charged.</p> <p>McFadden said it was reasonable for Martin to believe that outnumbered police officers allowed him and others to enter the Capitol through the Rotunda doors on Jan. 6, 2021. The judge also said Martin's actions were "about as minimal and non-serious" as anyone who was at the Capitol that day.</p> <p>Martin is the third Capitol riot defendant whose case has been resolved by a trial. He is the first of the three to be acquitted of all charges that he faced. The first two Capitol riot trials ended with convictions, although McFadden acquitted one of those defendants of a disorderly conduct charge after a bench trial last month.</p> <p>In the same courthouse where Martin was acquitted, a fourth trial continued on Wednesday for a former Virginia police officer who is charged with storming the Capitol with another off-duty officer. Jurors</p>

heard testimony from the fellow officer, who pleaded guilty to a riot-related charge and agreed to be a witness for prosecutors.

Martin, whose bench trial started Tuesday, testified that a police officer waved him into the building after the riot erupted. A prosecutor dismissed that testimony as “nonsense.”

The judge, however, said video shows two police officers standing near the Rotunda doors and allowing people to enter as Martin approached. One of the officers appeared to lean back before Martin placed a hand on the officer’s shoulder as a possible sign of gratitude, the judge said.

McFadden described Martin’s testimony as “largely credible.” The judge said it was not unreasonable for him to believe that officers allowed him to enter the Capitol, even though alarms were blaring and broken glass was strewn about the floor.

Martin was charged with four misdemeanor counts: entering and remaining in a restricted building, disorderly and disruptive conduct in a restricted building, violent entry and disorderly conduct in a Capitol building and parading, demonstrating or picketing in a Capitol building.

The judge said Martin appeared to be a “silent observer of the actions of others.” McFadden didn’t find any evidence that Martin intended to disrupt Congress from certifying President Joe Biden’s electoral victory.

Dozens of Capitol riot defendants have pleaded guilty and been sentenced, but Martin is the first to testify at a trial. His acquittal could embolden others to gamble on a bench trial, although McFadden so far is the only judge to preside over one and decide a case.

Martin said he “went with the flow” as he approached the Capitol and testified that he saw a police officer wave him into the building. Martin remained inside the Capitol for about 10 minutes after entering the building through the Rotunda doors, according to prosecutors.

Martin said he “enjoyed the day” of the riot.

“It was a magical day in many ways,” he testified on Tuesday before adding, “I know some bad things happened.”

“You understand that police officers died?” Justice Department prosecutor Michael Romano asked Martin.

At least nine people died in the riot or its aftermath. One officer died after he collapsed hours after being sprayed with bear spray and other officers who tried to quell the riot died by suicide in the months following the attack.

Prosecutors said Martin, an engineer, worked for a government contractor at the National Laboratory in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and held a top-secret security clearance on Jan. 6. Martin said he actually worked at a different facility in Los Alamos.

Defense attorney Dan Cron said Martin saw another person shake a police officer’s hand after entering the Capitol. Martin placed his hand on an officer’s shoulder “as a gesture of thanks and of good will,” Cron said.

Romano, the Justice Department prosecutor, said Martin joined the mob in crowding police officers who were trying to disperse the crowd. The prosecutor said Martin knew that he wasn’t allowed to be in the Capitol.

“The idea that he thought he had permission to do that is nonsense,” Romano said.

	<p>Other riot defendants have claimed police waved them in or said they could enter.</p> <p>McFadden presided over a bench trial last month for Cuoy Griffin, a county official in New Mexico. The judge on March 22 convicted Griffin of illegally entering restricted U.S. Capitol grounds but acquitted him of engaging in disorderly conduct.</p> <p>On March 8, a jury decided the first Capitol riot trial by convicting a Texas man, Guy Reffitt, of storming the Capitol with a holstered handgun.</p> <p>After Martin's acquittal Wednesday, a jury in a different courtroom heard a second day of testimony for the trial of former Rocky Mount, Virginia, police officer Thomas Robertson. The town fired Robertson and another officer, Jacob Fracker, who joined him at the Capitol on Jan. 6.</p> <p>Fracker was scheduled to be tried alongside Robertson before he pleaded guilty last month to a conspiracy charge and agreed to testify against somebody who was his mentor and a father figure.</p> <p>"I absolutely hate this," Fracker said. "I've always been on the other side of things, the good guys' side so to speak."</p> <p>Fracker testified that he and Robertson both believed the 2020 presidential election had been stolen from Trump. Fracker said they both wore gas masks as they joined a mob in storming the Capitol.</p> <p>Asked why he went to the Capitol that day, Fracker said he wanted to play a part in overturning the election results.</p> <p>"I felt like we had maybe been heard by whoever it was we needed to be heard by," Fracker said.</p> <p>He said he has grown ashamed of his actions on Jan. 6.</p> <p>"That's not the person I am," he said. "I wasn't raised like that."</p> <p>Fracker is due to be cross-examined by one of Robertson's lawyers on Thursday.</p> <p>Prosecutors plan to call two more witnesses, a police officer and FBI agent. A defense attorney said Robertson may testify. Jurors could hear attorneys' closing arguments as soon as Friday.</p> <p>More than 770 people have been charged with riot-related federal crimes. Over 240 of them have pleaded guilty, mostly to misdemeanors, and over 140 of them have been sentenced.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Report: 50 gig workers killed since 2017
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/business/uber-lyft-driver-deaths.html
GIST	<p>For nearly two years, Jassy StokesOliver crisscrossed the freeways of San Diego late at night, delivering food and dropping off riders as a gig driver for DoorDash, Lyft and Uber. She preferred working late because there was little traffic, and she never felt unsafe.</p> <p>Then two incidents hammered home the risks of the business. On a routine delivery trip last summer, her nephew Keshon, who also worked for DoorDash, was shot twice in the head by a passing driver. The 19-year-old survived, but the shooter has not been found.</p> <p>Just weeks later, as StokesOliver, 44, was trying to drop off cigarettes and a 12-pack of soda at a property for DoorDash, a man standing nearby followed her up to the door. As she bent down to leave the package, she saw out of the corner of her eye that he was holding a gun. She pulled out her phone to snap a picture, and he retreated. She hurried back to her car and sped off, with her 10-year-old son in the back seat.</p>

“That was the last day I drove for DoorDash. It just made me very uncomfortable,” said StokesOliver, who later moved to Dubai, United Arab Emirates. “I realized we’re not safe.”

The danger that StokesOliver and her nephew faced are stark examples of incidents gathered in a report released Wednesday by a driver advocacy group called Gig Workers Rising. The report said at least 50 gig drivers working for companies like Uber, Lyft and DoorDash had been killed while on the job in the United States since 2017.

Much attention has been paid to the risks that ride-hailing passengers might face when entering a stranger’s vehicle, but the drivers’ group and the family members of drivers who were killed say they hope the report will highlight a concern that receives less focus: the risk that passengers themselves may pose to drivers.

Although the report relied mostly on already public accounts in the news media, it is notable in part because it is the most recent count of violence against drivers since Uber and Lyft released their own safety reports years ago.

In late 2019, Uber said more than 3,000 people had been sexually assaulted, nine murdered and 58 killed in crashes in 2018 in the United States in its first-ever safety report. Uber pledged to release a new report every two years but has not yet released the second. It plans to do so this spring.

Lyft’s first safety report was released last year and said about 1,800 people had been sexually assaulted, four killed in physical assaults and about 50 killed in accidents in the United States in 2019.

Uber, Lyft and DoorDash said in statements that they had built their platforms with safety in mind, with features like the ability to connect discreetly with people at ADT, the security firm, or to share location information through ride-hailing apps.

It is hard to compare how dangerous gig driving is with other professions, although the Bureau of Labor Statistics makes some fatal occupational injury tallies public. But Gig Workers Rising argues that the risks of gig work stand out for more than simply the number of deaths.

Because gig drivers are often classified as independent contractors rather than employees, they often receive less support from the companies they work for when something goes wrong, the report said.

In some cases, Gig Workers Rising said, family members of dead drivers never heard from the companies they drove for or did not receive death benefits or assistance with insurance claims or funeral services.

DoorDash said it had spoken with StokesOliver’s family and helped them make a claim with their insurance.

In August, Isabella Lewis, a Lyft driver in Texas, was killed in what was seemingly a random attack by a passenger who was believed by the police to be a terrorist. After shooting her in the head, the man pulled her out of the vehicle and drove over her while fleeing in her car. He later died from wounds he received in a shootout with the police, according to news reports.

Lewis’ sister, Allyssa Lewis-Brown, said the loss had still not fully sunk in.

“It still hasn’t hit that I’ll never get to see her again,” said Lewis-Brown, 23, who remembered her sister as caring and protective. “That just kind of blows my mind. You think you have more time with people.”

She said she hoped her story and the driver death report would spur ride-hailing companies to find a way to keep drivers safer, perhaps by rigorously screening passengers before they can use the services. Lyft, she said, never spoke with her.

“The least you could do is pay for funeral expenses,” she said.

	Lyft said that it had tried to reach Lewis' family but had been unsuccessful.
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HEADLINE	04/06 Seattle continues to go backward on crime
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-continues-to-go-backward-on-crime-as-much-as-30-years-back/
GIST	<p>Last week when this newspaper asked the Seattle police to sum up how it's going with crime around the city, an assistant chief was blunt:</p> <p>"We're not seeing it slow down at all," she said.</p> <p>Crime is easy to hype and sensationalize. But the problem with this response is that it wasn't dramatic enough. Violent crime is doing a lot more than not slowing down – it's escalating, in rapid and unusual ways that Seattle seems unprepared for, despite a renewed focus on fighting it.</p> <p>The story the assistant chief was quoted in, by reporter Sara Jean Green, was about how there were 13 murders in Seattle through the first three months of the year.</p> <p>But by the time the story was posted, on April 2, there had already been two more murders – one a late-night shooting in Pioneer Square, the other an early morning shooting in the Chinatown International District. On Monday there was a third new shooting death, near North 145th and Aurora.</p> <p>"We've had over a 95% increase in more shots fired, with a 171% increase in people being shot compared to last year," Police Chief Adrian Diaz told our numb City Council recently. "And last year was one of the highest years we've had on record."</p> <p>The data shows violent crime rising so fast that 30 years of progress may be undone in a blink.</p> <p>For most of the past two decades, Seattle had a steady violent crime rate of about 500 to 600 incidents each year per 100,000 in population – about half what it was in the 1980s. The big picture, sometimes hard to see, was that we're a relatively safe place for a major city.</p> <p>Last year though, it abruptly surged 20% to 721 crimes per 100,000 people – the highest since 2001, according to FBI records.</p> <p>The first three months of this year have been even more of a throwback.</p> <p>Aggravated assaults — which last year were already up 24% — are up another 33% in the first quarter of 2022, as compared to the first three months of 2021. That's according to preliminary reports posted at the city's open records portal.</p> <p>Robberies are up 30% in 2022. Overall, violent crime is up 32% — from 1,051 incidents in the first three months of 2021 to 1,387 this year.</p> <p>Crime ebbs and flows. But if it keeps flowing at this pace, the city would approach a violent crime rate of 900 per 100,000 people — a level of violence last seen in 1995.</p> <p>It's touchy raising this topic in Seattle. As City Council President Debora Juarez said recently, people are "afraid they'll be called a racist, or demonized." I hesitate sometimes for different reasons — the above-mentioned worry about sensationalizing crime, and also because if you say something bad is happening here it gets used as proof by the Fox News types that Seattle is a dying liberal hellhole.</p> <p>Except something bad really is happening here. The violence trend is not unique to Seattle, but our city finds itself especially poorly situated to deal with it.</p>

Due to the backlash to the “defund the police” debacle, Seattle is now down 375 officers — putting the force at 1990s staffing levels, right along with the crime rate. This happened even though the city cut the police budget far less than the promised 50%. Chief Diaz said morale is so low that it’s hard to get cops to want to come work here anymore.

Last year, councilmembers reversed course and funded the hiring of 125 new officers. But Diaz told them late last month that the department has only been able to recruit and hire seven this year, while 34 more quit or retired. So the department is still shrinking as crime soars.

Meanwhile the effort to stand up an unarmed public safety force, as an alternative to militarized cops, is proceeding at about the same turgid pace as fixing the West Seattle Bridge.

Former Mayor Jenny Durkan [rolled out the plan for “Triage One” last July](#). But the city is only now doing a risk analysis of which 911 calls might be safe enough for this proposed new group to respond to. Police say it will likely be calls that officers are “simply not going to at this point” — so it may not ease their work load after all.

“We’re still working on this,” said Brian Maxey, the police’s chief operating officer.

OK, the council shrugged. There’s no urgency in that bunch. In meetings they seem mostly defensive about how their protest-fueled experiment isn’t working out.

At an earlier meeting, Juarez summed up that over the course of a year or more, the council had finally settled on a two-pronged strategy. One is to hire more officers. Two is to stand up an unarmed alternative.

The catch is that neither of these prongs is working at the moment.

“I don’t have an answer for you about what’s going to happen to stop people from getting a gun and coming into your store,” she told a Seattle shop owner who had been robbed repeatedly.

He got the message.

“For now, we need to harden,” he said, “and unfortunately become not as soft a target for people that would do our employees or our customers harm.”

In other words: He’s on his own. Words to live by, in a city frustratingly going back in time on crime.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Pierce Co. arrest serial bank robber
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article260179860.html
GIST	<p>A joint investigation involving law enforcement agencies in King and Pierce counties led to the arrest Tuesday of a 49-year-old man suspected of robbing 10 banks.</p> <p>The man was arrested by undercover Pierce County Sheriff’s Department deputies and a Puyallup Police officer after he allegedly robbed two banks in one afternoon. One robbery was in Puyallup and the second was about eight miles away in Summit.</p> <p>After his arrest, deputies said the man admitted to robbing a total of 10 banks, four in King County and six in Pierce County. According to a news release, the investigation into the robberies involved the Sheriff’s Department and police departments in Auburn, Des Moines and Milton.</p> <p>The first robbery Tuesday was at about 1 p.m. in the 700 block of Shaw Road East. Afterward, undercover deputies began searching for the suspected robber’s vehicle in the South Hill area.</p>

	<p>According to a news release, deputies were familiar with his vehicle because he was being investigated for several other bank robberies. At about 2:30 p.m., deputies said the man robbed a bank in the 11500 block of Canyon Road East. Deputies did not disclose details of either robbery or how much money was taken</p> <p>Minutes after the second robbery, undercover deputies spotted the suspected robber's vehicle and stopped the car with the assistance of a Puyallup police officer. The man was taken into custody in the 3900 block of South Meridian Avenue in Puyallup.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Charge: British embassy guard Russia spy
SOURCE	https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-61015772
GIST	<p>A security guard at the British embassy in Berlin suspected of spying for Russia has been extradited to appear in court charged with nine offences under the Official Secrets Act.</p> <p>David Ballantyne Smith, 57, is due to appear at Westminster Magistrates' Court on Thursday.</p> <p>The UK national was arrested by German police on 10 August.</p> <p>The offences are alleged to have happened between October 2020 and August 2021.</p> <p>Mr Smith, who had been living in Potsdam, in Germany, was flown back to the UK on Wednesday ahead of his appearance at Westminster Magistrates' Court.</p> <p>The Metropolitan Police said the nine charges related to the collection and communication of information useful to the Russian state.</p> <p>Nick Price, head of the special crime and counter terrorism division of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), said Mr Smith was accused of seven offences of collecting information with the intent of sending it to the Russian authorities, one of attempting communication and one of providing information to a person he believed was a member of the Russian authorities.</p> <p>He said the CPS had worked closely with its German counterparts to bring Mr Smith back to the UK after obtaining an extradition warrant.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 US charges oligarch, dismantles botnet
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/technology/us-charges-russian-oligarch-dismantles-cybercrime-operation/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration charged a Russian oligarch linked to the Kremlin with violating U.S. government sanctions and disrupted a cybercrime operation launched by a Russian military intelligence agency, officials said Wednesday.</p> <p>The actions came as the Justice Department said it was accelerating efforts to track down illicit Russian assets and as U.S. prosecutors helped European counterparts gather evidence on potential war crimes committed by Russia during its war on Ukraine.</p> <p>FBI and Justice Department officials announced the moves as the U.S. separately revealed sanctions against the two adult daughters of Russian President Vladimir Putin and toughened penalties against Russian banks.</p> <p>“We have our eyes on every dollar and jet. We have our eyes on every piece of art and real estate purchased with dirty money and on every bitcoin wallet filled with proceeds of theft and other crimes,” Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said, adding that “our goal is to ensure that sanctioned Russian oligarchs and cyber criminals will not find safe haven.”</p>

The indictment against Konstantin Malofeyev, a Russian media baron and founder of a Russian Orthodox news channel Tsargrad TV, is the first of an oligarch since Russia's war with Ukraine began in February. Malofeyev has trumpeted the invasion as a "holy war" and has supported Russia-aligned separatist groups in Ukraine.

He was sanctioned by the Treasury Department in 2014 for financing Russians promoting separatism in Crimea. Though those sanctions barred him from doing business with U.S. citizens, prosecutors say Malofeyev evaded those restrictions by hiring an American television producer to work for him in television networks in Russia and Greece, and tried to acquire a network in Bulgaria, as a way to spread pro-Russia propaganda in Europe.

Jack Hanick, a former CNBC and Fox News employee, was arrested last month for his work as a television producer for Malofeyev.

Malofeyev is not in custody and is believed to be in Russia. It was not immediately clear if he had a lawyer to speak on his behalf. The Justice Department said it had also seized a \$10 million investment that Malofeyev had tried to illegally transfer to a business associate in Greece.

The Justice Department also announced that it had taken down a botnet — a network of hijacked computers typically used for malicious activity — that was controlled by the Russian military intelligence agency known as the GRU. The botnet, which in this case involved thousands of infected network hardware devices, was dismantled before it could cause any damage, said FBI Director Christopher Wray.

Wednesday's announcements came two days after U.S. officials seized a huge yacht in Spain belonging to a Russian oligarch, Viktor Vekselberg, with close ties to Russian President Putin.

The Justice Department in the past year has taken aim against Russia-based cybercrime, recovering in June most of a multimillion-dollar ransom that Colonial Pipeline paid to hackers after a ransomware attack that halted operations. And the department announced charges last fall against two suspected ransomware operators.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said Justice Department prosecutors, meanwhile, were helping international efforts to uncover potential war crimes committed by Russia. U.S. officials have met with European prosecutors to develop a plan for gathering evidence, he said.

"The world sees what is happening in Ukraine," Garland said. "The Justice Department sees what is happening in Ukraine."

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HEADLINE	04/06 Judge: DOJ weak charges keep hacker jail
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/judge-prosecutors-filed-weak-charges-hacker-jailed-83908509
GIST	<p>ALEXANDRIA, Va. -- A federal judge has ordered the immediate release of a computer hacker who was sentenced to 20 years in prison for helping the Islamic State, and accused the Justice Department of trumping up charges against him to keep him in jail.</p> <p>The April 1 order from U.S. Judge Leonie Brinkema includes a harsh rebuke of the Justice Department's conduct against Ardit Ferizi. The native of Kosovo is the first person convicted in the U.S. of both computer hacking and terrorism charges.</p> <p>He pleaded guilty back in 2016 and was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He admitted hacking a private company and pulling out the names, email passwords and phone numbers of about 1,300 people with .gov and .mil addresses and turning the data over to the "Islamic State Hacking Division." The Islamic State published the names with a threat to attack.</p> <p>In 2020, in the earliest stages of the pandemic, Ferizi sought compassionate release, citing his asthma and obesity as placing him at greater risk of contracting COVID-19.</p>

Brinkema initially denied his request. But Ferizi renewed his request when an outbreak spread through his prison, and Brinkema granted him compassionate release over prosecutors' objections.

Brinkema's ruling resulted in Ferizi's transfer to immigration authorities for deportation. Before he could be deported, though, federal prosecutors in California brought new charges against Ferizi. The criminal complaint accused him of identity theft and wire fraud by coordinating with a family member to preserve access to email accounts that included large amounts of stolen data.

Ferizi's lawyers filed to have the new charges dismissed, accusing the Justice Department of vindictive prosecution because agents were upset by Ferizi's early release.

On March 22, just before a court hearing was scheduled in California to consider the accusation of vindictive prosecution, the new charges against Ferizi were all dropped.

In her April 1 order, Brinkema said prosecutors in California built their case on information from a fellow inmate of Ferizi with a history of unreliability.

She wrote that the circumstances of the case lead her to conclude that “there were elements within the Department of Justice who were so dissatisfied with this Court's decision to release defendant ... that they purposely tried to evade these decisions by filing very weak new charges against the defendant.”

Prosecutors have argued that, now that the pandemic has subsided, the rationale for compassionate release no longer exists.

Brinkema, though, said “it would set a terrible precedent to reverse the decision to release a defendant based on a change of circumstances caused by the government's manipulation of the criminal justice system.”

Prosecutors, who filed an appeal with the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond the first time Brinkema ordered Ferizi's release, have not yet indicated if they plan to appeal her most recent order.

Ferizi was among a relatively small number of inmates who successfully sought early release from prison under the pandemic. According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, more than 12,000 inmates filed motions for compassionate release in 2020 because of the pandemic. About 21% of those requests — a little more than 2,500 inmates — were granted.

A public defender representing Ferizi and a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia each declined comment.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Wind energy firm guilty plea; killed eagles
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/wind-energy-company-kills-150-eagles-us-pleads-83916292
GIST	<p>BILLINGS, Mont. -- A subsidiary of one of the largest U.S. providers of renewable energy pleaded guilty to criminal charges and was ordered to pay over \$8 million in fines and restitution after at least 150 eagles were killed at its wind farms in eight states, federal prosecutors said Wednesday.</p> <p>NextEra Energy subsidiary ESI Energy was also sentenced to five years probation after being charged with three counts of violating the Migratory Bird Treaty Act during a court appearance in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The charges arose from the deaths of nine eagles at three wind farms in Wyoming and New Mexico.</p> <p>In addition to those deaths, the company acknowledged the deaths of golden and bald eagles at 50 wind farms affiliated with ESI and NextEra since 2012, prosecutors said. Birds were killed in eight states: Wyoming, California, New Mexico, North Dakota, Colorado, Michigan, Arizona and Illinois.</p>

NextEra, based in Juno Beach, Florida, bills itself as the world's largest utility company by market value. It has more than 100 wind farms in the U.S. and Canada and also generates natural gas, nuclear and solar power

Almost all of the eagles killed at the NextEra subsidiary's facilities were struck by the blades of wind turbines, prosecutors said. Some turbines killed multiple eagles and because the carcasses are not always found, officials said the number killed was likely higher than the 150 birds cited in court documents.

Prosecutors said the company's failure to take steps to protect eagles or to obtain permits to kill the birds gave it an advantage over competitors that did take such steps — even as ESI and other NextEra affiliates received hundreds of millions of dollars in federal tax credits from the wind power they produced.

NextEra spokesperson Steven Stengel said the company didn't seek permits because it believes the law didn't require them for unintentional bird deaths. The company said its guilty plea will resolve all allegations over past fatalities and allow it to move forward without a continued threat of prosecution.

The criminal case comes amid a push by President Joe Biden for more renewable energy from wind, solar and other sources to help reduce climate changing emissions. It also follows a renewed commitment by federal wildlife officials under Biden to enforce protections for eagles and other birds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Criminal prosecutions had been halted under former President Donald Trump for birds killed inadvertently by industry.

It's illegal to kill or harm eagles under the migratory bird act. However, a wide range of industries — from energy firms to manufacturing companies — have lobbied for years against enforcing the law for accidental bird deaths.

The bald eagle — the U.S. national symbol since the 1700s — saw its populations widely decimated last century due to harmful pesticides such as DDT and other problems. Following a dramatic recovery, it was removed from protection under the Endangered Species Act in 2007. Biologists say more than 300,000 bald eagles now occupy the U.S., not including Alaska.

Golden eagles have not fared as well, with populations considered stable but under pressure from wind farms, collisions with vehicles, illegal shootings and poisoning from lead ammunition.

Most of the eagles killed at the ESI and NextEra wind farms were golden eagles, according to court documents.

There are an estimated 31,800 golden eagles in the Western U.S. with an estimated 2,200 killed annually due to human causes, or about 60% of all deaths, according to a study released last week by leading eagle researchers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other entities.

The study concluded that golden eagle deaths “will likely increase in the future” because of wind energy development and other human activities.

Companies historically have been able to avoid prosecution under the century-old Migratory Bird Treaty law if they take steps to avoid deaths and seek permits for those that occur.

Charging documents said company representatives, including ESI's president, were warned that eagles would be killed if the company built two wind farms in central and southeastern Wyoming, and also knew about a risk to eagles when they authorized the repowering of a New Mexico wind farm, about 170 miles (274 kilometers) from Albuquerque.

The company proceeded anyway and at times ignored further advice from federal wildlife officials about how to minimize the deaths, according to court documents.

	<p>“For more than a decade, ESI has violated (wildlife) laws, taking eagles without obtaining or even seeking the necessary permit,” said Assistant Attorney General Todd Kim of the Justice Department’s Environment and Natural Resources Division in a statement.</p> <p>ESI agreed under a plea deal to spend up to \$27 million during its five-year probationary period on measures to prevent future eagle deaths. That includes shutting down turbines at times when eagles are more likely to be present.</p> <p>Despite those measures, wildlife officials anticipate that some eagles still could die. When that happens, the company will pay \$29,623 per dead eagle under the plea deal.</p> <p>NextEra President Rebecca Kujawa said collisions of birds with wind turbines are unavoidable accidents that should not be criminalized. She said the company is committed to reducing damage to wildlife from its projects.</p> <p>“We disagree with the government's underlying enforcement activity,” Kujawa said in a statement. “Building any structure, driving any vehicle, or flying any airplane carries with it a possibility that accidental eagle and other bird collisions may occur.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Burkina Faso sentences ex-leader to life
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/burkina-faso-tribunal-sentences-leader-compaore-life-83907760
GIST	<p>OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso -- A Burkina Faso military tribunal has sentenced ex-President Blaise Compaore to life imprisonment for complicity in the murder of his predecessor Thomas Sankara in 1987 and for undermining state security.</p> <p>Compaore was tried in absentia as he has been in exile in Ivory Coast since he was toppled from power by a popular uprising in 2014.</p> <p>Compaore’s right-hand man Gilbert Diendere and former spy chief Tousma Yacinthe Kafando were also given life sentences. Diendere is already serving a prison sentence for an attempted coup in 2015 and Kafando is at large.</p> <p>Fourteen people were charged for Sankara’s killing in the trial which began in October. Eight other people were found guilty of a range of charges including giving false testimonies and complicity in undermining state security. Three were found not guilty including the doctor accused of forging Sankara’s death certificate to say he died of natural causes.</p> <p>There were gasps in the packed courtroom when the verdict of life imprisonment for Compaore was announced, with Sankara's supporters shaking hands, pumping fists in the air and chanting.</p> <p>Seated near the front, Sankara’s widow Mariam Sankara told The Associated Press that justice had been served.</p> <p>“The judges have done their jobs and I am satisfied. Of course, I wished the main suspects would be here before the judges,” she said. “It is not good that people kill other people and stop the process of development of a country without being punished.”</p> <p>The long-awaited trial, nearly 35 years after Sankara and 12 other people were killed, was hailed by many rights activists as a major step for justice in Burkina Faso.</p> <p>Sankara, a charismatic Marxist leader with a reputation as ‘Africa’s Che Guevara,’ has had a lasting impact on the country, changing its name from the French colonial Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, which means “land of honest men” in the local Moore and Dioula languages.</p>

Sankara's rule was marked by a socialist agenda of nationalizations and his government outlawed female genital mutilation, polygamy and forced marriages. He remains highly regarded among left-wing Africanists for his defiance of Western powers.

Sankara came to power in 1983 at the age of 33 after he and Compaore led a leftist coup that overthrew a moderate military faction. But in 1987 Compaore turned on his former friend in a coup in which he seized power and then ruled the country with an iron fist for 27 years before being ousted in an uprising.

While the verdict will help address the scars left by Sankara's death, his assassination remains a highly sensitive topic in the country. Of the three people sentenced to life in prison only Diendere is likely to serve any time, said Alexandre Raymakers senior Africa analyst at Verisk Maplecroft, a risk consultancy.

"Compaore remains in exile in the Ivory Coast and is unlikely to be extradited while Kafando remains at large," he said.

Even though it's unlikely Compaore will go to prison, many people in Burkina Faso felt his conviction was a victory.

"All the plotters of assassinating Thomas Sankara are condemned and this is historical for all Burkinabe," said Stanislas Damiba who attended the trial.

But for some in Sankara's family the verdict is not enough.

"It's a relief, it's not a satisfaction, it will never be a satisfaction," Paul Sankara, the younger brother, told AP by phone from the United States where he lives. "If you put what has been done on October 15, (1987) and the verdict, it cannot cover what's happened. They have been murdered, assassinated so we will have that inside of us as a family."

The defense has 15 days to appeal the sentence. Eliane Marie Kabore, a lawyer for one of the accused said she wasn't happy about the verdict but wasn't sure yet if they'd appeal.

Prosper Farama, a lawyer for the Sankara family, told AP that the trial brought a "big relief to all the people of Burkina Faso" because now the country could move on to other things.

In the past two years, Burkina Faso has been ravaged by jihadist attacks that have killed thousands and displaced nearly 2 million people and the violence shows no signs of abating. At least 100 people were killed in attacks in the last two weeks of March, according to a security report for aid groups seen by The Associated Press.

On Tuesday, an 83-year-old American nun, Marianite Sister Suellen Tennyson was kidnapped by armed men in the Center North region, she'd been living there since 2014, according to a statement by the Diocese of Kaya.

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HEADLINE	04/06 Fake HSI agents gave gifts to Secret Service
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/men-posed-federal-agents-gave-gifts-secret-service/story?id=83923156
GIST	<p>Four members of the United States Secret Service, including one member who was on first lady Jill Biden's protective detail, were suspended after they allegedly associated with and were provided gifts from two men who are accused of pretending to be Homeland Security Investigations agents.</p> <p>The two men, Arian Taherzadeh and Haider Ali, were charged with impersonating federal law enforcement officers and allegedly provided members of the Secret Service gifts such as rent-free apartments totaling \$40,000, surveillance systems, a drone, law enforcement paraphernalia and more, court documents said.</p>

"All personnel involved in this matter are on administrative leave and are restricted from accessing Secret Service facilities, equipment and systems. The Secret Service adheres to the highest levels of professional standards and conduct and will remain in active coordination with the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security," the Secret Service said in a statement Wednesday night.

Taherzadeh and Ali allegedly posed as "Special Police," claiming "to be involved in undercover gang-related investigations as well as conducting investigations related to the violence at the United States Capitol on January 6," according to court documents unsealed Wednesday night.

Taherzadeh went so far as to show someone who is identified in court documents as "Witness 1" an "HSI casefile" they were "working on" that was marked "confidential." They even went so far as to have identical Chevy Tahoes fitted with police lights.

"TAHERZADEH told Witness 1 that as part of the recruiting process, TAHERZADEH would have to shoot Witness 1 with an air rifle in order to evaluate Witness 1's reaction and pain tolerance. According to Witness 1, because he/she believed this was part of the DHS/HSI recruiting process, he/she agreed to be shot and subsequently was shot by TAHERZADEH. During the shooting, ALI was present."

Another witness who was interviewed in court documents, and is on the first lady's detail, was told by Taherzadeh that he was on a "covert task force" and he provided many favors to residents who were members of law enforcement. He also offered to gift the unnamed witness an AR-style rifle.

Additionally, the unnamed Secret Service agent on the first lady's detail was told by Taherzadeh that he had the same agency gun the witness did.

"TAHERZADEH came to Witness 2's apartment carrying a Glock 19 Generation 5 in an Ayin Tactical Holster. TAHERZADEH stated that he had an extra holster and wanted to give Witness 2 the Ayin Tactical Holster for Witness 2's newly issued Glock 19 Generation 5. Witness 2 is still in possession of this holster."

Another witness, who is not named, allegedly saw Taherzadeh's fraudulent Department of Homeland Security computer and Federal Training Center certificate.

The men told residents of the Navy Yard apartment complex where they lived that they were renting out apartments paid for by the DHS and set up a surveillance system around the apartment complex in which residents could access it at any time from their mobile device.

"These residents stated that they believe that TAHERZADEH and ALI had access to personal information of all the residents at the apartment complex."

One witness believed the two men had access codes to everywhere in the building due to them posing as law enforcement.

Taherzadeh allegedly walked up to another DHS employee who worked for HSI. However, when the employee looked him up in the database, he could not be found.

The investigation began when the suspects were witnesses to an assault involving a letter carrier and Postal Inspection Agents interviewed them.

"The USPIIS Inspector provided this information to the DHS Office of Inspector General, which then referred the information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for further investigation. It was at this point that the FBI began its investigation, which corroborated the statements of residents obtained by the USPIIS Inspector," court documents said.

The names of the suspended Secret Service members have not been released. The court documents did not say when these alleged interactions occurred.

HEADLINE	04/06 Sacramento: 5 opened fire in mass shooting
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/sacramento-police-people-opened-fire-deadly-mass-shooting/story?id=83918047
GIST	<p>Sacramento police say at least five men were involved in last weekend's mass shooting that left six people dead and a dozen injured.</p> <p>Investigators said Wednesday that number could grow as they piece together clues.</p> <p>The police said in a statement that it "is increasingly clear that gang violence is at the center of this tragedy."</p> <p>"While we cannot at this time elaborate on the precise gang affiliation of individuals involved, gangs and gang violence are inseparable from the events that drove these shootings," the police said in a statement.</p> <p>A fight broke out before gunfire went off in downtown Sacramento early Sunday morning, police said.</p> <p>The victims were identified by the Sacramento County Coroner's Office on Monday as Johntaya Alexander, 21; Melinda Davis, 57; Sergio Harris, 38; Joshua Hoye-Lucchesi, 32; Yamile Martinez-Andrade, 21; and Devazia Turner, 29.</p> <p>Two suspects, Smiley Martin, 27, and his brother, Dandrae Martin, 26, have been arrested in connection with the shooting. Smiley Martin was charged with possession of a firearm by a prohibited person and possession of a machine gun. while the younger Martin was charged with assault and possession of an illegal firearm, police said. Smiley Martin has a long criminal history and was just released from prison in January.</p> <p>A third person, Daviyonne Dawson, 31, was arrested for possession of a firearm following the incident, but he is not believed to be directly related to the shooting.</p> <p>The Sacramento police said it has received nearly 200 videos, photographs and other pieces of evidence from the public.</p> <p>"The suffering inflicted by gang violence does not limit itself to gang members. It spills over to claim and shatter innocent lives and harm our entire community," Sacramento Police Chief Kathy Lester said in a statement.</p>
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